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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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Executive Chef—I. Gabay, MBE

Head Cellarman—D. Balcombe

Head Storeman—A. E. Edmond

Catering Manager, 1 Parliament Street—Ms. S. Hovells, LHCIMA

Shorthand Writer to the House—Mrs. E. M. C. Holland

Parliamentary Works Officer—B. C. Sewell

Parliamentary Works Secretary—A. Makepeace

Head of Security—Chief Superintendent G. K. Dark

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Postmaster—J. Arnold

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3 February 1992

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THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 203**

SIXTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1991-92

House of Commons

Monday 3 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

1. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the weekly cost to someone on one and a half times male average earnings of abolition of the national insurance upper earnings limit.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): Someone earning £490 a week, which is about one and a half times average male earnings, would pay an extra £9 per week in national insurance contributions if the upper earnings limit was abolished.

Mr. Jones: Does my right hon. Friend agree that abolishing the upper earnings limit would hit well over 3 million people—for instance, policemen, health service workers and those in seasonal occupations—merely because overtime bonuses or profit-related pay would take their earnings over the average in any particular week? People in those categories certainly should not be described as rich.

Mr. Newton: It is absolutely true that a large number of people who could not remotely be described as rich would be hit by the proposal. What is more, they would receive absolutely nothing in return in the form of benefits: they need to be aware of that.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Secretary of State aware that millions of people have been hit by the actions of his Department over the past 12 years? The Department has taken away the earnings-related supplement, and have got rid of death and maternity grant and income support for 16 and 17-year-olds who would not work on the Tory Government's slave labour schemes. Most of those measures were introduced by the present Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman's question about national insurance upper earnings limit?

Mr. Skinner: Absolutely—and it is the Secretary of State's Department that is guilty of taking benefits away from millions of people who would have benefited if the Labour Government's policies had been maintained over the past 12 years by this tawdry, rotten Tory Government.

Mr. Newton: I am aware of two things. First, all the groups to whom the hon. Gentleman has referred were hit much harder by the policies of high taxation and raging inflation over which the Labour Government presided. Secondly, all the groups who are considered to be priorities by both the Government and the Opposition—low-income pensioners, low-income families and disabled people—have benefited significantly from what the Government have done in recent years.

2. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the estimated cost to business if the lower earnings limit for employers' national insurance contributions were abolished.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Michael Jack): We estimate that abolishing the lower earnings limit would cost business around £175 million a year in extra national insurance contributions.

Mr. Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the substantial extra burden that will be placed on employers, well-meaning proposals to extend the benefits of the national insurance system to low-paid employees would have the opposite effect to the one intended, as most would lose their jobs?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend, in his usual perceptive way, has put his finger precisely on the import of such proposals. It is interesting to note that they come from the same stable that brought us the national insurance surcharge. It is also interesting to note that, when Labour was last in power, the combined contribution to the national insurance scheme by an employee earning £52 a week and his employer was £10·40, while under the present Government it is £3·43.

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister confirm that the present Government have introduced higher taxes than any other Government, and that they have increased national insurance contributions for those on average and low pay by a massive 40 per cent? Is it right that someone earning £200,000 a year should pay only 1 per cent. in national insurance? Should not such people bear their share of the burden?

Mr. Jack: It is amazing that the hon. Gentleman, who professes knowledge of social security matters, has not alluded to the fact that we restructured the national insurance scheme. I do not know where he has been for the past few years, but we have reduced the rates on lower earnings so that people now pay on average about £3 a week less in national insurance.

Disability Working Allowance

3. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what alterations he is considering to the disability working allowance scheme before it is introduced; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): None, Sir. The disability working allowance scheme, which will come into effect from April, will provide a radical new opportunity for disabled people who can and wish to work.

Mr. Madel: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this very welcome new allowance will be extensively publicised and that the allowance itself is not taxable?

Mr. Scott: Yes. The disability working allowance—like its companion benefit, the disability living allowance—will be tax free. It will be extensively publicised on television and in the press through mail shots and other methods of communication. Incidentally, we shall introduce into our advertising campaign efforts to ensure that the information available can be well interpreted by those with sensory disabilities.

Mr. Alfred Morris: What is the Government's response to the increasingly strong feeling among disabled people that this measure is not an appropriate one for tackling their now, by common consent, quite shocking employment disadvantages? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the DWA, with its very high marginal tax rates —as high as 94 per cent., leaving disabled people with only 6p in the pound of their additional income as workers— simply substitutes a new poverty trap for the employment trap, making some disabled people actually worse off for earning more?

Mr. Scott: Hardly anyone will be worse off if they are on disability working allowance. For example, a couple with two children aged six and 11 would still be entitled to DWA if they had a net income of £189 a week. I believe that this is an important benefit. It has been widely welcomed by the organisations of and for disabled people outside the House. One of its most important aspects is that people who go on to DWA will retain their underlying entitlement to any benefit which they may have had before they went on to DWA and that they will not have to requalify, if they fail in their efforts to work.

Unemployment Benefit

4. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many unemployment benefit claimants there were in York in June 1987 and currently; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: In June 1987, unemployment in York was 5,542. In December 1991 it was down to 3,816.

Mr. Gregory: I thank my hon. Friend for those figures. Does he agree that, if my calculation is correct, that is a reduction of 31 per cent. and that the reverse would be the case if we were to move from our free enterprise and initiative policy to a policy whereby state nationalisation took over Northern Electric in York, Yorkshire Water, British Telecom and other similar companies? Is it not right that there would be a reversal of the excellent figures that my hon. Friend gave?

Mr. Jack: As somebody who, as a child, was brought up in the city of York, I have nothing but praise for the excellent way in which my hon. Friend has represented his constituents. I can confirm that a 31 per cent. reduction in unemployment is the correct figure. My hon. Friend has done much to boost the employment opportunities in York by championing the railways, tourism and other industries from which the city draws its economic well-being. The people of York will have noticed the mocking smiles on the faces of Opposition Members when I referred to my hon. Friend's record.

Community Care Grants

5. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number and size of community care grants in Newcastle upon Tyne in the six months April to October 1991.

Mr. Scott: Between April and October 1991, Newcastle upon Tyne district office awarded 1,250 community care grants, worth over £290,000.

Mr. Cousins: Will the Minister confirm that the office in Newcastle upon Tyne is in the habit of pricing its community care grants in two well-known catalogue shops and that unfortunately it failed to spot in April 1991 that the Government had increased value added tax? The result was that a constituent of mine—and no doubt many hundreds of others who have just been referred to by the Minister as being included in the 1,200 people who received grants—was short changed and not given the full amount. A disabled constituent of mine was short changed by more than £2 in his community care grant for an orthopaedic bed. Will the Minister investigate the matter urgently and ensure that the Department of Social Security office in Newcastle upon Tyne is made aware of the fact that the Government increased VAT last April?

Mr. Scott: Of course I shall examine the matter urgently and refer it to the Benefits Agency. Given its urgency, I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not write to me about such a detailed case, which would have enabled me to deal with it earlier.

Mr. Bradley: The Minister clearly has no understanding of the damage that the social fund is inflicting on thousands of the poorest people in cities such as Newcastle and Manchester. In 1991, 68 per cent. of applicants were refused community care grant and just over 50 per cent. were given a budgetary loan, which they had to repay from their meagre benefits. When will the Department publish the review of the social fund, which we have long awaited, and when will he restore the right of the poorest in our society to a grant for essential items such as clothing, furniture and cookers, which have been denied them under the current system?

Mr. Scott: I contest the hon. Gentleman's assertions at the end of his supplementary question. The social fund has given extensive help to people in real need. Some 60 per cent. of applicants are refused community care grant because they do not meet the basic criteria. We have not received the report of the social policy research unit at York, but when we do we will publish it urgently.

Pensioners (Incomes)

6. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners are in the top half of the income distribution; and what was the comparable figure for 1979.

Mr. Newton: Twenty eight per cent. of pensioners were in the top half of the income distribution in 1987 compared with 24 per cent. in 1979.

Mr. Burns: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will he confirm that pensioners are worried about a return to the rampant inflation of the mid-1970s and, although it does not directly affect people who have reached state retirement age, a 9 per cent. tax being put on the savings of people who are saving for retirement? People considering retiring early would be caught by that punitive tax.

Mr. Newton: Pensioners were among those who were hardest hit by the rates of taxation and inflation of the 1970s. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's second point, because it is not yet widely understood by the three quarters of people who go into retirement with savings of their own that, as they approach retirement, their ability to build up those savings would be subject to a 9 per cent. tax as a result of one of the Opposition's proposals.

Mr. Frank Field: If a higher proportion of pensioners are now in the top half of the distribution, who has taken their place in the lower half, and why? What part have the Government's unemployment policies played in that?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that there is any question of the Government pursuing a policy of unemployment, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. The increased number of pensioners in the top half of the income distribution is the result of pensioners' average net incomes rising by a third or more in real terms because of the policies of the Government.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many people confuse the level of the state pension with the amount of money that pensioners have available to pay all their weekly bills? Is not it true that the majority of pensioners have extra income from savings, from an occupational pension or from other benefits such as income support?

Mr. Newton: Yes, indeed. As I said earlier, more than three quarters of recently retiring pensioners now have income from savings, and more than 60 per cent. of them also have income from occupational pensions. In both cases, the incomes have risen substantially.

Mr. Allen: Will the Secretary of State concede that many people are doing better, which we welcome, because of the state earnings-related pension scheme which was introduced by the Labour Government? The people who are not doing well are those without additional income on lower incomes, such as single pensioners, who have lost the equivalent of £15 a week, and married couple pensioners, who have lost the equivalent of £25 a week. Will the Secretary of State take this chance—one of his last—to apologise to pensioners for what he has done?

Mr. Newton: I make two points: first, the incomes of pensioners in the lowest quintile have risen by 15 per cent. in real terms over this period, and those pensioners will have benefited further since those statistics were compiled by the increases amounting to a third of a billion pounds that have been made in income support premiums in the past three years. Secondly, it is not SERPS that is the major factor in this increase but the increased income from savings and occupational pensions.

Mr. Harris: Do not the figures given by my hon. Friend underline the point that many pensioners are well off—and we welcome that—and that that is a justification of the Government's policy of targeting extra help on those who really need it? When will the Opposition grasp that simple fact?

Mr. Newton: Certainly one of the satisfactory developments of recent years is that, taken as a whole and on average, pensioners' living standards have been rising. As I have said repeatedly, there remain a number of people for whom we think it is right to do more, and we have been doing more through the income support premiums.

Benefits (Greater London)

7. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of people in the Greater London area receiving social security benefits in 1978-79 and the total in 1990-91.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Statistics for the number of recipients of all benefits are not collected on a regional basis.

Mr. Banks: It does not surprise me that the Minister does not want to know the facts. She must know that, by any standards, the number of people in London who have been impoverished since 1979 has more than doubled. She knows that and the statistics are at least available from the Library but not with the precision that she could have given if she had chosen to give them to the House. I have never seen so many unemployed and homeless people begging on the streets of London. Thanks to the Prime Minister, 16 and 17-year-olds cannot claim social security. I suggest that, instead of choosing the mad scene from Lucia di Lammermoor for his desert island disc, the Prime Minister would have done better to have chosen something from the Beggar's Opera because there is a whole chorus on the London streets which could join in.

Miss Widdecombe: May I suggest that, for sheer consistency in the way in which the Opposition present their numbers, they should perhaps choose the Grand Old Duke of York as their theme. The hon. Gentleman can no more claim that poverty has doubled in London than he can claim that for Great Britain as a whole. Because we have taken more people into the net by raising income support and making other improvements, more are now assisted through the benefits system.

Mr. Bowis: Is it not a fact that more and more generous benefits covering many different needs are available to people in London and elsewhere? Does my hon. Friend agree that one statistic that needs to be found is that of the number of Londoners who would lose if the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions were to be removed?

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed. Given the average salary in London, I imagine that there would be an extensive loss if, as my hon. Friend says, that policy were to be implemented. What is more—as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier—no compensating benefit would be received by those who would be hit by the abolition of the upper limit. In fact, it would turn Beveridge on its head and use the national insurance system as a tax system.

Retirement Pension

8. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received over the level of the retirement pension.

Mr. Newton: We regularly receive representations and inquiries from a wide range of interested organisations and individuals about the level of the retirement pension.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to confirm an answer recently given to me by a junior Minister—it is in *Hansard*, of course—to the effect that a large number of pensioners—nearly 40 per cent. —have incomes of £70 or less out of which they pay about £10 to £15 in rent? Is it not a fact that if the link with earnings had not been broken by his Government 10 years ago—indeed, nearly 12 years ago—a married pensioner would be £28 a week better off this April? That is what the country is concerned about, not the lies, smears and distortions organised by Tory central office and the Tory press against the Labour party.

Mr. Newton: Such calculations take absolutely no account of the increased taxation and inflation which would have resulted from the pursuit of the policy that the hon. Gentleman is advocating. I leave with him the thought, especially as Labour is apparently committed to adding another £9 a week to national insurance contributions for 3 million or more people, that if such a policy had been pursued, contributions for an employee on average earnings and his employer would now be about £9 a week more than they are.

Mr. Ashby: My right hon. Friend referred to the increase in the incomes of pensioners as a result of savings and of occupational pensions. Can he give any idea of what the level of occupational pensions will be by the turn of the century?

Mr. Newton: I will not attempt to predict what will happen on that front between now and the end of the century because that will depend on many factors. I can tell my hon. Friend that pensioners' incomes from occupational pensions—for those who have them—rose on average from £13·90 a week in 1979 to £27·70 in 1988. That is a virtual doubling of the income from occupational pensions over that period. I expect to see the trend continue if sensible policies continue to be pursued.

Mr. Meacher: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us what representations he has received from the employees and pensioners of the Maxwell Communication Corporation and AGB companies about the level of their pensions? Is he aware that, due to his culpable negligence in sitting for 19 months on regulations under the Social Security Act 1990, which would have protected pensioners in the event of a company wind-up, thousands of pensioners now stand to lose most or all of their pensions for which they have contributed for up to 35 years? Does not he think it right that all such pensioners should receive compensation when they have lost so much pension due to his complacency and reprehensible laxity?

Mr. Newton: I presume that the hon. Gentleman thought it right to return to the matter in the House having notably failed to achieve the result for which he hoped by an overheated press release to the same effect which he issued at the end of last week. He knows that he has deliberately raised unnecessary alarm among many thousands of pensioners by the way in which he has presented the matter. It is simply not the case that pensioners in such schemes will get nothing or will be left penniless, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. Under existing regulations, if there are not sufficient assets to secure the guaranteed minimum pensions—that is the equivalent of what the pensioners would have got under the state earnings-related pension scheme—the guaranteed minimum pensions can be and would be underwritten by the Government.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend refuse the invitation from the Opposition to treat pensioners as a political underclass? Will he remember that more and more people reaching retirement age wish to have independence in their own hands, which means that they must be in receipt of policies that encourage that independence, including savings, during their working career?

Mr. Newton: That is absolutely right, and nothing has more clearly revealed the Opposition's attitude to people's wishes in the matter than their persistent hostility to the 4 million or more people who have taken out personal pensions for exactly that reason.

Social Fund

9. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources for the social fund.

Mr. Scott: Each annual allocation of funds to district budgets has been designed to redistribute resources in a progressively more equitable way. As part of our routine annual review of allocations, we shall continue to consider how best to ensure that funds are targeted where they are most needed.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister accept that the distribution of resources under the social fund is extremely inequitable and difficult to get right? Will he also accept the Opposition's view that, with the social fund, the Prime Minister first demonstrated on a national scale his dangerous incompetence? That incompetence later extended to the economy when he was promoted. Does the Minister agree that, in the present state of affairs, some parts of the country have too much money in the social fund and still have money over after meeting all claims, low and high priority, which are legitimate? Some areas can meet only high priority claims, whereas other areas can meet low and high priority claims but have no money over. Is not it an example of what is wrong with the country that the Prime Minister was promoted for trying to reinvent the Lady Bountiful in his first major act as Minister in 1988?

Mr. Scott: I do not claim—and I do not suppose that the Prime Minister would—that the social fund is perfect. I do claim that it is better than any of its predecessors in meeting exceptional need in exceptional circumstances. I recognise the local pressures which the hon. Gentleman perceives, but I reiterate that we endeavour to see that the resources allocated reflect the need in the localities. That is why South Glamorgan had an extra 10 per cent. allocated in August 1991 and another £50,000 in loans only a week or so ago. We try to ensure that any surplus resources are reallocated sensibly and flexibly.

Mr. Hind: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that if he were to convert all loans under the social fund to grants, as has been promised by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), the cost would be about £130 million and would greatly prejudice the operation of the social fund as it now works?

Mr. Scott: I certainly understand my hon. Friend's point. I have heard suggestions that that will be Labour party policy, but I have not heard whether the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury agrees with such a policy.

Dr. Kumar: If the Minister genuinely believes in the equitable distribution of the social fund, may I invite him to review cold weather payments, because the senior citizens in my area of east Cleveland have lost out during the past week? In addition, how are cold weather benefits assessed in the first place?

Mr. Scott: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take the trouble both to read my announcement about the improvements in cold weather payments this year and to go to the Library to see how those allocations are made. All the information is there for him to find. In one of our coldest winters for the past 20 years, the system has been operating successfully and flexibly. I believe that the linkages to the meteorological stations have operated more effectively than hitherto. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to make a particular point about his locality, he should write to me about it and I shall ensure that account is taken of his views.

Disability Living Allowance

10. **Sir David Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements he has made to ensure that existing recipients of attendance allowance and mobility allowance receive disability living allowance in April.

Mr. Scott: All attendance allowance beneficiaries aged under 65 and all mobility allowance beneficiaries will transfer automatically to the equivalent level of disability living allowance. We are writing to all existing claimants to let them know how the change will affect them. We are also inviting claimants who currently receive only one of the two existing benefits, and consequently will transfer to only one component of DLA to consider claiming the other component.

Sir David Price: Will those in the third category, who are claiming extra money to help with personal care and who do not currently receive attendance allowance, have their claims determined by an adjudication officer or a medical practitioner? Will social factors be given equal weight with medical factors when determining such claims?

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We shall be substantially demedicalising—to use my word—the whole process for claiming both the disability living allowance and the disability working allowance, and moving to judgments made by adjudication officers. That, in itself, will be an important step forward, but perhaps even more important is the fact that, because of the change, there will for the first time be a proper appeals procedure for those who need help with care.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: In attempting to ensure that people are made aware of the DLA, which is something that we all want, will the Minister ensure that there is effective and efficient management? Although I realise that he cannot know of a particular incident that has been drawn to my attention today, is he aware that information has been sent to deceased claimants, thus causing a great deal of distress to the families concerned? If that was an isolated incident I am sure that the Minister will join me in apologising for it, but will he look at distribution methods to ensure that such incidents do not happen on any scale?

Mr. Scott: I certainly apologise for distress caused by any such incident. We have sent out more than 1 million letters to individual customers to advise them of the change that we are making and the benefits inquiry line has provided back-up information for those who have received such letters. We are doing our best, but I suppose that when something of this scale is embarked upon, it is almost inevitable that the occasional mistake will be made. I repeat that I am sorry if any distress has been caused.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that spending on disability benefits by this Government has increased by over 150 per cent., in contrast to the policies advocated by the Labour party, the priorities of which are pensions and child benefits?

Mr. Scott: I believe that the Government can be proud of their record on benefits for disabled people over the past 12 years. My hon. Friend has rightly drawn attention to the progress that has already been made. The introduction of the two new benefits will help more than 300,000 people at a cost of about £300 million.

Disability Working Allowance

12. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the new disability working allowance will come into operation.

Mr. Scott: Disability working allowance will start on 7 April. The new benefit will be widely publicised from this week onwards. Claims can be made from 10 March 1992.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that this new benefit will be widely welcomed? Will he confirm that if we had adopted a scatter-gun approach to benefits, as the Labour Government did, the substantial improvements in help for the disabled since 1979 would not have been possible? Can he say by how much the groups affected by the scheme will have benefited in those years?

Mr. Scott: As an earlier supplementary question made clear, we have increased expenditure on long-term sick and disabled people by 150 per cent. during the period of this Government at an annual rate of about £550 million compared with about £350 million under the Labour Government, using real-terms figures. Therefore, we have made substantial progress. What is more, we have sought to identify areas of disability that in the past have not had the attention that they deserve, and to meet them with the new benefits.

Mr. Simon Hughes: What will the Minister say to people who will receive the new allowance from April when they learn that last Friday a Conservative Back Bencher talked out the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill? Was that done with implied or expressed connivance of the Government? In any event, will the Minister condemn it?

Mr. Scott: If the hon. Gentleman took pains to read my speech on Friday and see my remarks, he would understand my approach to the matter. The Bill came on second, had less than two hours debate and, according to the normal customs and practices of this House, did not receive a Second Reading. We should see how well efforts to encourage and persuade employers to take note of the needs and the abilities of disabled people to contribute to their enterprises do, before we consider the need for further legislation.

National Insurance

13. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women pay national insurance contributions at the upper earnings limit.

Mr. Jack: On average, 3 million men and nearly 500,000 women who are employed or self-employed will pay national insurance contributions at the upper limit during 1991-92.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my hon. Friend agree that any proposal to abolish the upper limit on national insurance contributions would mean that millions of people who could never remotely be regarded as rich would pay a great deal more in contributions and get nothing extra in benefits?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. It is interesting that he talks of people getting nothing for their additional contributions in the very week when the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) writes an article in a magazine in praise of the contributory principle —indeed, in praise of Beveridge in this the 50th anniversary of his excellent proposals.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is very efficient.

Mr. Jack: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman says that I am very efficient because that is what we in the Department of Social Security strive to be.

We now know that the Opposition's approach to national insurance would mean a something-for-nothing society. My hon. Friend points to a further interesting fact: although the figures that I gave were 100 per cent. correct, I would estimate that during five years of any Parliament as we see earnings increase perhaps an additional 500,000 people would be swept into this disreputable proposal from the Labour Benches.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Has my hon. Friend considered consulting people such as members of the Secondary Heads Association to see whether all the heads of comprehensive schoools in my constituency would relish the idea of paying an extra 9 per cent. from their earnings, if the upper limit were removed? While he is at it, he might consult about increased levels of taxation, because secondary heads will not like that.

Mr. Jack: I should be delighted if my hon. Friend's constituents would care to drop me a note with information on their individual salaries. I could do a little costing exercise for them. I am sure that they, like senior nurses, managers, middle managers and other experienced teachers, will all think carefully about what my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) has said. He has put before the House an illustration of how the Labour party wants to increase the cost of national insurance. Even under the old Labour scheme somebody on £130 a week would pay £26 in national insurance—employers and employees contributions combined—whereas under the Conservative proposals somebody on the same earnings would pay only £19·24. We will stick by our national insurance arrangements.

Pensioners (Savings)

14. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average pensioner's income from savings.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest figure, for 1988, shows that the average pensioner's income from savings is £19·90 per week.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. Friend agree that many pensioners have built up savings throughout their lives, partly from income and, occasionally, from redundancy payments, and that it is rare that that income from savings is unearned? Is she aware of the great unease among pensioners about the fact that an additional surcharge may be put on their fairly modest level of income from savings? Will she confirm for those pensioners that their savings are safe with us?

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed, I would say that savings in general are safe with us. Those who are most likely to be affected by the Labour party's proposals to surcharge savings are those who are just coming up to retirement. They will want to save, but they will not enjoy the exemptions provided to pensioners. They have reached the crucial point at which they can save because they have discharged other liabilities, but they will find such saving difficult.

On savings, the one thing that we do not want is a return to the Labour Government's policies of the 1970s. We do not want to see pensioners' or anybody else's savings eroded by the inflation levels sustained by the then Labour Government. It is worth noticing that since the Government came to power, pensioners' income from savings has risen by 8·6 per cent. It would be a dim prospect for them if we returned to the policies of the Labour party.

THE ARTS

Arts Sponsorship

29. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what steps he is taking to improve sponsorship of the arts.

35. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the operation of the business sponsorship incentive scheme.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): The business sponsorship incentive scheme has been a great success and I am giving further encouragement to sponsorship of the arts by increasing its budget by £1 million a year to £4·5 million. From April this year, second-time sponsors will be matched by £1 of BSIS money to every £2 of extra sponsorship. Businesses that have sponsored for more than three years will also be brought back into the scheme.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend agree that although business sponsorship of the arts is extremely important and welcome, it would be just as beneficial for the arts, particularly local theatres such as the Civic theatre in Chelmsford, if we had a national lottery to which everyone could contribute to help to raise funds for the arts? Can he confirm whether he will use his immense powers of persuasion to try to obtain a manifesto commitment to a national lottery?

Mr. Renton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and to Chelmsford borough council for their regular support of the Civic theatre. I agree with my hon. Friend about the usefulness of a national lottery. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department gave a warm welcome to the principle of a national lottery when he spoke in the House the other day. I am sure that the revenue from such a lottery could, for example, be useful for the repair of existing theatres and in helping to commission new arts buildings in the years ahead.

Mr. Sims: I am disappointed that my right hon. Friend was not able to accept my invitation to attend the concert of the Royal Choral Society on a European theme at the Festival hall on 7 March, particularly as I hope to take part in it. However, I understand his commitments. Is he aware that that concert is possible only because it is being sponsored by St. Ivel with a matching grant from the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts—ABSA? That is a good example of the continuing success of the scheme.

Mr. Renton: I am very sorry that I will not be able to attend the concert at which my hon. Friend will be singing. He always sings in close harmony in the House, and I am sure that his voice will be harmonious on 7 March. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments, because the significant fact about St. Ivel's sponsorship is that it is a perfect example of sponsorship working very well and of the use of the business sponsorship incentive scheme, which I just mentioned.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: I accept the valuable role played by the Minister, but does he accept that, although sponsorship is valuable, even more important is the fact that institutions such as the Royal Opera House cannot go much further in the sponsorship race and will require funding? Will he now look at those matters seriously because, in the present recession, those institutions are in a grievous plight about which the Minister must do something?

Mr. Renton: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for recognising the value that I have put into the arts. I appreciate his comment. However, we have just had the third record increase in the amount of money that the Government have given to the Arts Council of Great Britain, which is directly responsible for passing on such moneys to the Royal Opera House, the Birmingham Royal Ballet and other companies. The increase for the year that has just begun is 14 per cent.—a further £27 million. I am delighted that that has happened, because it shows the Government's firm commitment to the cause of the arts throughout the country.

Mr. Tony Banks: I believe that the Minister will soon come to the London borough of Newham on an official visit to hear about our arts policy. I hope that that does not come as a total surprise to him, as it appears to. His visit will give us an opportunity to show him the problems in getting sponsorship from businesses in an area like the east end of London. The recession is one of the problems and the sheer absence of businesses is another. Will the Minister therefore consider a way to equalise national sponsorship from business, so that areas with few opportunities can derive some of the benefits from areas with ample opportunities?

Mr. Renton: The reason why I consulted my brief was because I am to visit the Young Vic shortly and I was not certain whether the hon. Gentleman would appear on the stage or in the audience on that occasion. He is a natural actor and I thought that he might have a part in the play. May I remind him that the London Arts Board, which has just taken over from Greater London Arts, is settling down well to the work of funding arts associations throughout London. It is extremely well led by Clive Priestley as chairman and Tim Mason as director. I hope that the London borough grants scheme, which got into such a terrible muddle last year, will do much better this year in awarding available money to London boroughs.

British Library

31. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will meet the chairman of the British library to discuss resources.

Mr. Renton: I meet the chairman of the British library regularly. Our discussions include the library's resources and other matters of interest ot the board.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Minister confirm that the British library's acquisitions budget has been cut by 41 per cent. in real terms, resulting in thousands of scientific periodicals no longer being stocked? Are not the Government bungling the building of the new British library, with expensive delays and omissions? In particular, is not the lack of reading space a fiasco, with the new reading room providing only 7 per cent. more space than the old one? In those circumstances, is not Treasury pressure to sell off the spare land on the site a national disgrace? *[Interruption.]* My last point——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One question please.

Mr. Renton: The acquisitions budget for 1992-93 will be £250,000. The question of spare land is the subject of a study by the British Library Board into what the British library's needs will be after the new St. Pancras building has been opened in 1996 and how needs may be satisfied. No land will be sold before 1994 and there is every intention of having a serious study before then. I regret the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the British library, because it will be a great new building. There are difficulties at present, particularly with regard to paintwork and shelves in the new basement, but, once complete, it will be one of the finest buildings built in this country this century.

Mr. Fisher: Will the Minister now answer my hon. Friend's excellent point about why the Government have cut the acquisitions budget of the British library by 41 per cent. in real terms in the past four years? If the British library is, as the Minister said, the greatest English language library in the world, why are the Government not providing acquisition money or adequate transitional money? Why has the Minister deliberately blocked the money promised by his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce), who promised in May 1990 that the Government would make money available for works of art for the opening of that new building? The Government are neglecting what should be a great jewel in the British crown.

Mr. Renton: I understand why the hon. Gentleman may be frothing at the mouth at the thought that, after all the years that he has spent preparing as shadow arts Minister, were the Labour party to be elected—horror of horrors —it would not be him but Melvyn "Time to Dance" Bragg who would be Labour's arts Minister. That must be a disappointment. There would be loud applause for the suggestion from Labour Back Benchers, but he has my sympathy.

We are giving grant in aid next year of £65·4 million to the British library——

Mr. Steen: A great deal of money.

Mr. Renton: As my hon. Friend says, it is a great deal of money. How the British library decides its acquisitions budget, as distinct from other parts of its budget, is up to that organisation. But it is receiving a large amount of money—in addition, it receives £61 million specifically for the new St. Pancras project.

Museums and Galleries (Improvements)

32. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will report on the museums and galleries improvement scheme.

Mr. Renton: I am very pleased to announce that, thanks to the generosity of the Wolfson Foundation and family charitable trust, the museums and galleries improvement fund has been extended for a further two years to 1995-96. It is already supporting more than 100 projects.

Mr. Steen: The whole House will want to congratulate the Minister on wresting the 14 per cent. increase in the arts budget from the Treasury. That will have a dramatic effect across the country as the money can be spent on all sorts of arts projects. I hope that the Minister will ensure that the 14 per cent. increase goes to arts projects—the museums and galleries improvement schemes and other proposals that his Department funds—and is not caught up in too much bureaucracy. I am particularly interested in the project in Dartington.

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend; I know of his interest in Dartington hall and the Cookworthy museum in Kingsbridge. I insisted that the large increase that I was able to give to the Arts Council of Great Britain be matched by a reduction in the administration costs between the council's headquarters and the regional arts boards. That meant that last year £1 million was knocked off the total administration budget so that as much as possible of that handsome increase should go to the artists and performers, not just in metropolitan London but throughout the country.

CIVIL SERVICE

Executive Agencies

39. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on the "next steps" programme.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): "Next steps" is progressing well. We plan to launch at least a dozen more agencies in April, when 50 per cent. of the civil service will be working fully on "next steps" lines. Agencies are achieving targets and are at the forefront of delivering the better services called for by the Government's citizens charter.

Mr. Mitchell: Is it not absolutely clear that the "next steps" agency approach of the 1980s proved extremely successful in improving accountability, promoting a better service to the public and giving agency employees greater job satisfaction? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the 1990s the citizens charter, particularly the charter mark, should continue and intensify those excellent developments?

Mr. Renton: Yes, I agree. I certainly hope that every executive agency will apply for a charter mark, which will be seen as a clear reward to those in public service who provide customer satisfaction, which all too often in the past has been sadly missing. That position has already changed with the executive agencies, and the improvement will be rewarded with the charter mark.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Minister aware of the increasing acts of violence and threats against Benefits Agency staff by claimants? Is he aware that there has been at least one case in which, having seen a name badge, a claimant looked in the phone book and traced the Benefits Agency employee to his home. Is it not about time to bring to a halt the silly idea which threatens the safety of Benefits Agency staff?

Mr. Renton: I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman say that. I have been to the Benefits Agency in my constituency, where the manager and staff made it plain to me that if staff were concerned about their safety they would not wear a name badge—but most of them want to because they want to be able to be identified by the public, so that if someone rings up a week later he can identify the person to whom he spoke a week before. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman talks more to the Benefits Agency in his constituency to persuade its members of the wisdom of adopting this course.

Public Appointments Unit

47. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on progress in increasing the number of women registered with the public appointments unit.

Mr. Renton: Yes, Sir. The number of women registered has increased from 18 per cent. of the total in 1986 to 33 per cent. in 1992. There are now clearly 2,000 women on our list. I welcome this increase.

Mr. Coombs: I am sure that all hon. Members will welcome that increase, although there is clearly still a long way to go to reflect the fact that women constitute 51 per cent. of the population. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, just as the number of women on the list has increased, it is also important to increase the number of women appointed to various positions in the public service? Can he reassure the House that there is no risk of discrimination against women who possess excellent qualities when appointments are made to such positions?

Mr. Renton: Yes, I can certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. Of course it takes time for the increased number of women on the list to work through into actual appointments, but one of the purposes behind the Prime Minister's initiative was to see that they did work through into actual appointments. Every Whitehall Department now has a nominated Minister who is specifically responsible for promoting equal opportunities in public appointments.

Mrs. Dunwoody: If the Minister cannot tell us how many women have been appointed, will he tell us a statistic that I am sure that he will know? How many of the extra women on the list are card-carrying members of the Conservative party?

Mr. Renton: Unlike the Labour party and the Militant Tendency we tend not to have card-carrying women, but I can tell the hon. Lady, although I was not asked this question, that precisely 50 per cent. of those appointed to public bodies as a result of public appointments unit nomination this year are women.

Sir John Stokes: Does my right hon. Friend agree, in the calmness of being on his own, that all this is just trendy nonsense? What we want in the public service are the best people, irrespective of whether they are men or women.

Mr. Renton: I am sure that my hon. and gallant Friend, whom I have known for many years and for whom I have a great affection, would agree that about half the best people are women.

Unions (Morale and Recognition)

41. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of civil service unions to discuss morale and recognition.

Mr. Renton: I meet civil service trade union representatives from time to time to discuss a variety of issues. It is the job of managers in Departments and agencies to achieve our aim of having an efficient, effective and well-motivated civil service.

Mr. Fisher: When the Minister next meets the trade unions will he explain to them why the Government threatened not to recognise trade unions representing employees on Ministry of Defence property when those trade unions are affiliated to the Labour party? Will he remove that slur on the loyalty and patriotism of those employees and give a categorical assurance that there is nothing incompatible about membership of the Labour party and membership of the trade unions in question?

Mr. Renton: Of course I give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. He knows the answer very well: the instance that he has mentioned was a matter for the Ministry of Defence, which looked further into the matter and decided not to pursue it.

Dr. Marek: If that is so, will the Minister go a bit further? The Universities Funding Council is resisting recognition of civil service unions. Professor Graeme Davies, its chief executive, says that he does not want any unions in his building. What can the Minister do about such "ignorant and proud of it" behaviour?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman knows well that the UFC is not one of my responsibilities. I am surprised by what he says; if he cares to write to me or to the Secretary of State for Education and Science I will certainly have the matter looked into.

Executive Agencies

42. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what initiatives are being taken to introduce private sector practices into agencies.

Mr. Renton: The "next steps" initiative is making use of the best and most appropriate management practices from all sectors, such as contracting out, recruitment of chief executives from the private sector, performance pay, publication of reports and accounts, customer surveys, trading funds, and financial flexibility to carry money between financial years.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that most museums in the private sector have opening hours that suit the wishes of the public—the consumers and customers—whereas museums in the public sector tend to have opening hours that suit the wishes of the trade unions? Will he see what he can do to persuade the public sector to follow the private sector's practice in this case?

Mr. Renton: I take my hon. Friend's point about the independent museums. In defence of some of my clients in the national museums and galleries, I should point out that, for example, the Victoria and Albert museum has been able to extend its opening hours. One of the reasons why it has been able to do so is its policy of charging for special exhibitions. Therefore, I regret Labour's stated intention of abolishing all museums charges, because that would remove from museums the opportunity to be flexible about staying open later, to improve services and generally to meet the added requirements of the public.

Civil Servants

44. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many civil servants in employment at the latest date are *(a)* men or *(b)* women.

Mr. Renton: All of them.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Minister confirm that when the Property Services Agency is privatised, many men and women will lose their jobs? Will he also condemn the scandalous proposal that when the PSA is privatised, up to £85 million of taxpayers' money should be handed over by the Government to Tarmac, which will take it over, so that any proposed redundancies of men and women in the PSA will be paid not by the privatising company but by the taxpayer? Since that is nothing short of a swindle, should not the Minister stop it?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman's remarks about the privatisation of PSA are fanciful and ridiculous in the extreme. Speaking of that, I wonder just what the hon. Gentleman had in mind when he tabled this question. Even with his fancifulness, it is hard to imagine the civil service employing anyone who is not either a man or a woman.

President Yeltsin and UN Security Council

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about President Yeltsin's visit to London on 30 January and about the special meeting of the UN Security Council in New York on 31 January. I was accompanied to New York by my right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

Both meetings came at an important time in Russia's relationship with the rest of the world and at a critical time for world peace and stability. Russia has, in President Yeltsin's own words, thrown off the shackles of communism. She remains a nuclear super-power. As such, and as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, she has world responsibilities. It is essential for our own peace and security that Russia continues to play the positive role on which President Gorbachev embarked and which President Yeltsin is set to continue and to develop. I believe that we should offer them our support in this.

I called the meeting in New York during our chairmanship of the Security Council so that the council could meet at the highest level to reaffirm and develop its commitment to peacekeeping and peacemaking. The timing was particularly apt following the appointment of a new Secretary-General and with Russia taking the seat in the Security Council formerly held by the Soviet Union. The meeting was successful, and I should like to highlight the key points.

This was the first time in the 47 years of its history that the UN had met at the top level. For the first time ever, the Heads of State and Government of the United States, Russia, China, France and Britain sat around the same table and pledged themselves, with the other members of the council, to collective security, to international law and to our commitments under the United Nations' charter.

A statement was agreed by all the members of the Security Council. Copies are in the Library of the House. In it we reaffirmed that all disputes between states should be resolved peacefully in accordance with the provisions of the charter. We committed ourselves to the fight against terrorism. We asked the Secretary-General to make recommendations for a more effective role for the United Nations as peacekeeper and as peacemaker. Under article 99 of the charter, the Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which, in his opinion, may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. We hope the new Secretary-General will use those powers. He will report to us within six months with his recommendations. We committed ourselves to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation and to the conclusion of a chemical weapons convention this year. The council endorsed the idea put forward by the British Government, and recently endorsed by the General Assembly, of a UN register of conventional arms transfers.

During his visit to London, President Yeltsin noted that Britain had been the first country to denounce the August coup, and the first to recognise Russia; the first to propose Russian membership of the International Monetary Fund; the first to propose an April deadline for that membership; and the first to support a stabilisation fund for the rouble.

It is essential that Russia join the IMF at the earliest opportunity, and I believe that a stabilisation fund may need to follow if Russia is to have a prospect of establishing a successful market economy. There is, of course, a financial cost in this, but the cost of failure and a return to dictatorship and the cold war would be infinitely higher. It is in our national interest and in the interests of the west as a whole to help Russia, and we shall continue to take a lead in doing so. I undertook to make it one of the priorities of our presidency of the European Community later this year to carry through an improved trade and co-operation agreement with Russia.

In our discussion of arms control issues, President Yeltsin committed Russia to further significant reductions in the Russian strategic and international arsenal. I told him that we had already committed ourselves to a cut of one half in our sub-strategic nuclear weapons and to smaller conventional forces. I told him also that Britain's only strategic weapon would be the minimum deterrent constituted by Trident. President Yeltsin accepted that Trident was indeed a minimum deterrent and that the focus of arms control negotiations should be on the arsenal of the two super-powers.

We agreed to co-operate in handling surplus Soviet weapons and in safeguarding nuclear materials. I offered to send a technical mission to Moscow to assess the immediate needs at first hand. I have also offered to send a small number of officials from the Ministry of Defence to the Russian Ministry of Defence to advise on the restructuring and control and financing of armed forces in a democratic society. We discussed the problem of the possible leakage of expertise from Russia in the field of weapons of mass destruction. President Yeltsin has made proposals for handling this problem, and we have offered our help as part of an international effort.

The President and I agreed to establish a secure telephone link between our two offices. This is not meant as a crisis hot-line; it will enable us to conduct the significant amount of business we have to undertake.

We signed a joint declaration—the text of which is in the Library of the House—on relations between our two countries. It will form the basis of a treaty which the President and I hope to sign during the official visit to Britain which he will make later this year. It will be the first such treaty since 1766.

This is a time of great hope in international affairs, but also of uncertainty and potential instability. The two meetings on which I have reported to the House have shown our determination to work for a safer world and a new partnership with Russia in the cause of peace.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): In thanking the Prime Minister for his statement, may I first confirm our welcome for President Yeltsin's visit to London and for the United Nations Heads of Government meeting?

May I also take this opportunity to wish the new United Nations Secretary-General success in his efforts to prepare recommendations for improvement in the preventative diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping capacities of the United Nations?

There is clearly force in Mr. Yeltsin's view that greater support for economic development is essential for political stability and for the prevention of any possibility of a

[Mr. Neil Kinnock]

return to totalitarianism and militarism in the former Soviet Union. Will the Prime Minister therefore tell us what specific proposals he *has made for supporting* economic projects in the republics of the former Soviet Union, particularly in the distribution industries, which are obviously of basic importance to economic growth and to the development of markets?

The Government's announced change of policy on export credit facilities for the republics of the former Soviet Union is welcome, but can the Prime Minister clarify the extent and the effectiveness of these changes in practice, as it appears that the conditions limiting the operation of those credit guarantees is likely to make them unusable for several years to come?

May I express my satisfaction that the Prime Minister does not now take the reluctant attitude towards the establishment of a rouble stabilisation fund that he did in July and August last year when I put that proposal to him? Will the right hon. Gentleman say what support he is receiving from other G7 countries for his recent endorsement of a rouble stabilisation fund?

Can the Prime Minister say also whether he has encouraged discussion of the establishment in the new democracies of a payments union similar to that which played such an important part in western Europe's recovery after the second world war?

Following his contact with Mr. Yeltsin and with other leaders of former Soviet republics and Warsaw pact countries, does the Prime Minister accept the need for a co-ordinated international aid and support programme —a modern Marshall plan—as proposed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe? Does he not agree that such a programme could, amongst other things, establish an effective linkage between western support for economic development and the response from the newly independent states in terms of schedules for comprehensive, verifiable, and quicker disarmament?

I endorse the Prime Minister's request to the Security Council that all member nations "commit" themselves

> "anew to . . . reinforced measures of arms control."

With that in mind, can the Prime Minister tell the House what his response is to President Yeltsin's call for Britain, France, and China to participate in the process of international negotiations for reduction in strategic nuclear weapons? What is the Prime Minister doing to promote a comprehensive test ban treaty, and what proposals does he have for strengthening the non-proliferation treaty?

The Prime Minister's declarations of support for the United Nations are, as ever, to be commended. I therefore invite him to express his regret that, according to the figures published by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office last week, United Kingdom support for United Nations development agencies has been cut by 38 per cent. in real terms since 1979. Will the Prime Minister tell the House whether he has any intention of reversing such cuts? Does he not agree that, without such a radical break with his previous policies, his statement that

> "a new situation in the world needs new ideas and a new impetus"

will not carry much conviction?

I welcome the Prime Minister's use of the words "partners and friends" to describe the relationship with the new democracies. We on this side of the House will continue to propose and to support policies which give practical effect to the hope for a new and durable world order of peace, liberty, and prosperity which was expressed again at the United Nations last week.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome for President Yeltsin's visit, and for the broad welcome that he gave to the outcome of last week's United Nations meeting. I am pleased that we have a joint view on so many matters of such importance.

As to economic support, one noticeable difference in the circumstances within the former Soviet Union over the past few weeks is that the price of a liberalisation programme has been put in place. That is a vitally necessary component of creating a free and open market there—but it necessarily brings with it great short-term difficulties. It was an immensely brave step for President Yeltsin to take, and on that basis I believe that it is right for the United Kingdom to change its policy on a rouble stabilisation fund—as an indication that we are prepared to support the reform programme that is now in place.

There will be need for support in that fashion, and that can satisfactorily come only through the International Monetary Fund. For that reason, I proposed that Russia should join the fund, and that has the support of other members. We propose that that process should be concluded not later than April, but it is immensely to be hoped that it can be done far more speedily. Once Russia is a member of the International Monetary Fund, that will make it possible for Russia to receive sustantial assistance in cash to deal not only perhaps with a stabilisation fund but balance of payments support—which I personally suspect will be needed in the Soviet Union. It is equally likely that Russia will need ECGD or comparative support in the months and years ahead, not just from this country but from others.

Let me respond to the specific ECGD point raised by the right hon. Gentleman. We have announced the availability, for Russia and the other republics, of £280 million worth of ECGD support this year, but that is dependent on an IMF programme's being in place. I hope that that will be the case not later than April; it may well be a good deal earlier. The arrangement is also dependent on the Russian republic's continuing to meet its debt obligations in the future, as in the past.

As for the arms control matters, we have been working to improve the measures of arms control. During my discussions with President Yeltsin, he explicitly accepted the disproportion between the British nuclear deterrent, Trident, and the nuclear capacity that will be available to the Soviet Union even after it has carried out the reductions to which it has committed itself, and which will take a decade or more to implement. That point was explicitly recognised by President Yeltsin in our private discussions, and also acknowledged in public after our meeting.

The United Kingdom has spoken bilaterally to a number of countries about the non-proliferation treaty. We have raised it through the United Nations, and we see the United Nations as the primary focus for encouraging a much wider group of countries to sign the treaty and abide by it. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have made very large contributions to the development agencies, and we shall continue to do so.

As for the question of partnership and friendship in the 1990s, the joint declaration that we signed sets out a series of bases on which we can improve our relationship with Russia. We intend that joint declaration to be turned, during this year, into a comprehensive treaty between Russia and the United Kingdom—the first that we have had since 1766.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a Back-Benchers' day, and a motion has been tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert). I shall allow questions to continue until 4.30. I hope to be able to call every hon. Member who wishes to speak before then, provided that single, brief questions are asked.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, through his energy and skill, he has now given a powerful send-off to the new United Nations and its new Secretary-General in the very complex and difficult tasks that we expect the UN to have to face in the post-cold-war world?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that much the most important and immediate task now faced by the international order is to ensure that there is not a quantum leap in the number of countries with access to smaller, tactical and battlefield nuclear weapons and nuclear warheads? Will he assure us that everything will be done, as a matter of urgency—both by this country and by the Security Council and its agencies—to ensure that that task is tackled, collectively, with the utmost vigour? Failure now would involve colossal cost later.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his kind welcome for what has been achieved.

I think that there are two aspects to the question of a quantum leap in nuclear weapons. First, there is the success of the non-proliferation treaty, and the inhibition on extra states' developing a nuclear capability; secondly, there is ensuring that the nuclear capability—particularly the sub-strategic capability—that is at present spread throughout the republics of the former Soviet Union remains under strong control, is brought together and is dismantled at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Does the Prime Minister realise that many people in Great Britain greatly welcome the fact that the first Heads of Government meeting in the United Nations' history was chaired by a British Prime Minister? Does he further realise that what will also have been welcomed and noted is the difference in attitude between the Prime Minister and that of his predecessor towards the United Nations? Those of us who have criticised the Government's and western nations' lack of urgency in providing appropriate assistance to the Soviet Union will also welcome the new steps and the energy that is being shown in this area

If, as the Prime Minister rightly says, the protection of non-proliferation is the absolute key to world peace, why are the Government seeking to increase the number of nuclear warheads that are carried on Trident, when they have the option of keeping the number the same, at a time when the rest of the world is decreasing them? How can it be consistent—perhaps the Prime Minister will answer the question now, since he did not answer the Leader of the Opposition—for the Prime Minister's policy to be as expressed in the statement but for that policy to be opposed to a comprehensive test ban treaty?

Finally, if the Prime Minister says, as he rightly does, that one of the centrepieces of reshaping the United Nations so that it can cope with the new challenges to world peace is to strengthen the United Nations' peacekeeping capacity, why is it that the Government are, I am told, $8 million in arrears with their dues towards United Nations' peacekeeping?

The Prime Minister: On the first of the right hon. Gentleman's three points—how many nuclear warheads we have—he knows that we have never indicated how many warheads there will actually be: I do not believe that it would be in the interests of our security for us to do so. However, we shall maintain the minimum necessary. That has always been our position, and I reaffirm it again today.

As for the nuclear test ban treaty, for as long as it is necessary for us to have nuclear weapons, we require the ability to test and we propose to keep the ability to test. For Opposition Members to suggest that we should have nuclear weapons but not the ability to test shows how little they understand the responsibility that lies with a nuclear power.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the problem faced by the United Nations in recent decades has been entanglement in east-west confrontation and that at this stage of its development it does not need to embark on an extremely controversial and difficult period of structural reform but should make greater use not only of the United Nations charter but of the existing United Nations machinery? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that we need greater United Nations intervention in the sovereign affairs of sovereign states—as in Iraq, where there is gross violation of human rights and massive oppression of minorities?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend's second point. In the Gulf war the United Nations played a part of immense importance. I hope that in similar circumstances in the future it would do so again. I share also my hon. Friend's view about the reform of the United Nations. There are parts of the United Nations that certainly could work better. We are keen to help them to do so, but the Security Council is working well and reform is neither necessary nor desirable.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Did the Prime Minister discuss the anti-ballistic missile treaty? Is not the United States trying to scrap the ABM treaty so that it can push on with its star wars programme? Does the Prime Minister agree that we do not want the militarisation of space, and that in any case it is not needed? Will he put his weight against that treaty being abrogated?

The Prime Minister: I know that the hon. Gentleman is chairman of the Labour party's defence committee and that therefore he is a specialist in these matters. On the ABM treaty, he will know that the United States is also talking to Russia about acting jointly in that matter.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): May I enthusiastically welcome the enhanced role for the United Nations, particularly the excellent choice for its new Secretary-General? My right hon. Friend will be aware, however, that contributions to the main United Nations budget have not in the past always been paid on time or in full, even by members of the Security Council. Can my right hon. Friend give us an assurance that the additional funds

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that the United Nations needs to carry out these increased responsibilities will be provided by the members of the United Nations?

The Prime Minister: I cannot answer for other members of the United Nations, but in our meeting last week I certainly drew attention to the necessity for ensuring that the United Nations had the right financial and material aid to complete the tasks that we have set it.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The Prime Minister told my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) that the Government make a large contribution to the UN development agencies, but he must be aware that our contribution has been cut by 38 per cent. since 1979. What would happen if other advanced nations did the same? When do the Government expect to meet the target for overseas aid of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product?

The Prime Minister: Before the hon. Gentleman lectures me about the 0·7 per cent. commitment, he should bear in mind that the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that that is an aspiration and not a commitment. There is no indication that the Labour party would meet it.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although I welcome the economic measures to assist the Soviet Union—granted, as he rightly says, because of the courage of President Yeltsin in implementing his reforms—the other side of the coin is that it would have been a terrible mistake if we had jumped the gun and granted the assistance before the reforms were implemented? It is unlikely that Boris Yeltsin would be implementing those reforms if we had jumped the gun, as the Opposition wanted.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. The important fact is that President Yeltsin is there now, and we have an obligation to assist him; it is in our own interests to do so.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Is not one of the most serious threats to stability and peace in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union the presence of large minorities within the new states that do not necessarily recognise those states? I realise the major problem of recognising new borders, but did the members of the Security Council discuss new machinery or initiatives to deal with those potentially tremendous conflicts? Yugoslavia was the most extreme case, but there are many other examples that could threaten stability in central and eastern Europe.

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the potential causes of instability, but that was not the subject of our discussion last Friday and it was not discussed other than in the margins of the meeting.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): May I particularly welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement that he has agreed to President Yeltsin's request to send advisers to help the Russians with the traumatic changes that they must make to their armed forces as a result of the change in the situation? Will he instruct them to explore further the possibility of greater co-operation so that we can work, train and perhaps exercise with the Russian forces? It is becoming clear, day by day, that our interests and theirs are growing more and more together in our determination to achieve stability in the new Europe.

The Prime Minister: We are content to explore any and all of those matters; indeed, a number of them have been the subject of detailed discussion. We have agreed in principle on some completely new ideas of co-operation between Britain and the Russian defence ministries and the armed forces, in particular on the handling of military budgets, co-ordination between military and civilians, accountability to Parliaments and such matters.

On the safe disposal of nuclear weapons—a critically important matter to the House and elsewhere—NATO made a general offer of co-operation in December. I again offered our bilateral co-operation to President Yeltsin last week, and we are prepared to make United Kingdom expertise available to the Russians.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Prime Minister rightly emphasised the question of non-proliferation. Why, therefore, does he continue his nuclear fatalism through his pursuit of the Trident programme, which increases the number of nuclear warheads on Polaris from 192 to 512? He may wish to confirm or deny those figures. How does that set an example to countries that he wishes to discourage from adopting nuclear deterrence? If he believes in friendship and partnership, at whom will we be pointing the Trident warheads?

The Prime Minister: I dealt with the first part of the hon. Lady's question in reply to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). She will recall that Britain halved its sub-strategic nuclear weaponry only last year.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): Is it not clear that the welcome improved prospects for an effective United Nations are due to the Soviet Union's abandonment in the late 1980s of the aim of intimidating western Europe into submission and expanding its power generally? Was not that change in turn due to a realisation by the Soviet Government that the Governments of western countries, particularly the British Government, were not going to adopt a policy of one-sided nuclear disarmament, despite the urgings of Opposition Members?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend's analysis on that point. I think that the right decisions were taken in recent years on the deployment of cruise and other nuclear matters, and we are now seeing the benefit of that.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): How can the Prime Minister possibly justify spending £23,000 million in capital and maintenance on a missile system which does not work properly, which does not deter, which is not independent and against whom there is now no one to target it?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept the figure, I do not accept the analysis, and I do not accept the premise.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the most important subjects on which he obviously made so much progress with President Yeltsin was that of non-proliferation? Can he tell the House a little more about any plans that he and the Government may have to recruit or to find peaceful employment for some of the rocket scientists and nuclear experts of Russia and, perhaps, even of the Ukraine? It seems to many of us that that would be one way to limit the spread of nuclear know-how which could be one of the longer term dangers of the issue.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend about that. I discussed the question of the nuclear scientists with President Yeltsin last Thursday. He has put forward some interesting ideas for international centres to redeploy nuclear scientists on civilian work. We have agreed to examine that with him and to see in what way the United Kingdom and other countries can help Russia and the other republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States to use the talents of their nuclear scientists for peaceful purposes.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Prime Minister rule out United Nations military action against Libya?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Will the Prime Minister bear in mind the vast quantity of surplus conventional and chemical weaponry held by the former Soviet Union states? Did he attempt to get undertakings from President Yeltsin that he would use his best endeavours to ensure that they resist the temptation to sell that weaponry to unreliable states in the middle east and elsewhere?

The Prime Minister: I am able to say to my right hon. Friend that I raised that matter with President Yeltsin very forcibly indeed.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I am sure that the House will agree that the United Nations' enhanced role in the issues that the Prime Minister has mentioned will be most welcome. However, as that role will need to be funded, does he support the Government's policy of cutting aid to the United Nations development agencies by 38 per cent. since 1979? Does not he think that we are a bad example to tell people to act through the United Nations when we as a Government have failed to do so?

The Prime Minister: We have been one of the foremost supporters of the United Nations, and the Government have played the prime role in enhancing the position of the United Nations in the past few years.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his robust leadership of the United Nations last week. Was he able to discuss with President Yeltsin the problems of the old Soviet bureaucracy in Russia and the way in which it is inhibiting the ability of the people of Russia to receive the aid that they deserve? Will he consider setting up in Moscow a unit composed of people from British industry, from the British Government and from the British-Soviet Chamber of Commerce to try to help the Russians receive the aid that is being held from them by the stupidity of their bureaucracy?

The Prime Minister: One of the principal difficulties faced by the Russians at present is that they have no effective distribution system whatsoever to deal with the aid that is available to them. That distribution system fails at the bureaucratic level and in terms of the direct transport available. That is a matter of discussion between the Russians and the European Community at present, and the Community has stated its willingness and ability to assist.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Prime Minister reconsider his answer on nuclear tests? Does he realise that, statistically, the one test a year that Britain carries out is not sufficient to verify that our bombs would work if, tragically, they were ever to be used? However, one test a year causes major increases in radiation and problems of cancer. The Prime Minister's answer is wholly illogical, as he would say that if there were one nuclear weapon left in the world there should be tests. Is it not time that we followed the Russians and went for a permanent test ban for all weapons?

The Prime Minister: I do not feel inclined to reconsider my earlier answer. It is necessary to have a minimum level of testing, which is precisely what we have. We test for safety reasons, and it is right that we do so. We will continue to do so.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Given the scale of the problem both in the size of the capital required and in the need to stabilise the rouble, does my right hon. Friend agree that the International Monetary Fund is by far the best body to deal with the problems? How soon can Russia become a member of the IMF? Does it not to some extent depend on the willing co-operation of the United States? Is the IMF not far and away the best organisation to deal with such matters, given its long experience of dealing with the ravages of socialism?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right to say that the IMF is by far the best organisation to assist in the circumstances. I hope that Russia can become a member speedily—in any event, not later than April. I assure my hon. Friend that the United States also supports Russia's membership of the IMF.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I welcome the Prime Minister's decision to consider a stabilisation fund for the republics. That is a major and important development. What are his preliminary views on the conditionality that would have to apply to the republics if such a fund were set up?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his earlier remarks. The conditionality must be determined in the light of the IMF discussions with the Russians when we shall have a clearer view of precisely what Russia's needs are and of the capacity that Russia has to meet its current problems. Although I am sure that there will be conditionality of some sort, I believe that it is necessary to move as comprehensively and as speedily as possible to provide the rouble stabilisation fund and possibly other assistance as well.

Sir Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): During his discussions with the new Secretary-General and with President Yeltsin, did my right hon. Friend raise the importance for the future of the United Nations of the restoration of the idea and the reality of the true international civil service? That was contained in the charter and some of us endeavoured to fulfil it. It has been fulfilled by certain individuals, the most conspicuous of whom is my former colleague and assistant Mr. Piccu.

[Sir Robert Rhodes James]

That ideal and reality, opposed so bitterly by the former Soviet Union, surely should be restored as a major part of the future of the United Nations.

The Prime Minister: I did not discuss that particular matter with the Secretary-General or with any of the other United Nations officials. I share my hon. Friend's view that it is an important matter, and I will take an opportunity to discuss it in the future.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Some of us will be able very shortly to assess the position for ourselves. For the immediate period and during the winter months, is it not essential for food to get into the shops and, whatever problems there are with distribution, for the west and the other developed countries to help? Should we not make it clear when we are in the former Soviet Union that aid from the developed countries is conditional only on two factors —no going back to any form of dictatorship, and no armed conflict between the republics?

The Prime Minister: I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said on both points. The food aid—the humanitarian aid—which is necessary now is unconditional; there can be no question of conditionality for the food aid. A substantial amount of that has already been delivered. There is a good deal more which is in the pipeline committed by the European Community but which is not yet in Russia. It is intended that it will go to Moscow and Leningrad and beyond those two major cities.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): Is it not the case that the present serious conventional and nuclear arms reductions have been brought about by the twin policies of determination and constant vigilance, especially in this country and through its Government? Is not the success of those policies the answer to those who sought in the past or who will seek in the future to undermine those policies and to question the value of the nuclear deterrent?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is no necessity to add to what he has said.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The Prime Minister told the House that the new Secretary-General is conducting a review of the machinery of the United Nations. As the chairman of the meeting, does the right hon. Gentleman have any thoughts of his own about which current members of the Security Council should give up their permanent seats and which other countries that seek permanent seats should be given those seats?

The Prime Minister: I see no need for change at the moment.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his historic initiative and speech. Does he agree that the central theme that emerged from the meeting was that proactive diplomatic intervention is always preferable to reactive military intervention? If that is to be acheived, and if there is a hope for the United Nations in the future, does he agree that that hope lies not so much in building up a United Nations army as in finding a common political cause among the members of the Security Council?

The Prime Minister: I agree, without reservation, with what my hon. Friend has said. Proactive diplomatic intervention is precisely what we increasingly see as the role of the United Nations. I hope that the report from the new Secretary-General will lead us further in that direction.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): This was clearly a successful and possibly historic meeting of the Security Council, but I am sure that the Prime Minister will accept that it is time that deeds followed words in a number of relevant international commitments. Therefore, was anything said either in the Security Council itself or, more probably, in the margins about bringing the Uruguay round to a successful conclusion, upon which success so much of the world's economic prosperity rests?

The Prime Minister: Not in the meetings because that is not the purpose of the Security Council. However, in the margins and in the bilaterals in New York, the Uruguay round was the matter that was first discussed with President Bush and other leaders. I agree entirely with the right hon. Gentleman that nothing is more important at the moment than the successful and speedy conclusion of the Uruguay round.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Does the Prime Minister agree that certain historic inherited tensions and forces must be overcome in the former Soviet Union if the objectives that were agreed last week are to be achieved? By what means are the reforms, the democratic achievements and the other agreements that were reached last week to be measured and implemented?

The Prime Minister: They must be implemented by the Russian Government and the Governments of the republics, but the framework of the economic reforms will no doubt be set by the International Monetary Fund in the report that it will submit before making available the loans that I expect to be made available. Once an IMF programme is in place, it is monitored by the International Monetary Fund.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Prime Minister aware that, when he refused to answer an earlier question about Britain scabbing on its contributions to the United Nations fund to the tune of about $8 million, he was no different from somebody who refuses to pay the poll tax? Is it not ironic that, when Britain holds the chair of the United Nations, Britain is not up to date with its subs? Is it any wonder then that, despite not having nuclear power, Japan and Germany look like taking the United Kingdom's seat at the United Nations Security Council? What state have we reached when, after 13 years of Tory Government, Germany and Japan are pushing us out of the Security Council? What a sorry state we have reached.

The Prime Minister: We can always rely on the hon. Gentleman for a little light relief. We can rely on him also to sink below any occasion, as he has yet again this afternoon. No one is pushing the United Kingdom out of its Security Council seat, as I said to his hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who appeared to suggest that that might be desirable.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I welcome especially my right hon. Friend's commitment to a reinforced effort on the part of the United Nations in peacekeeping and peacemaking. In that regard, did my right hon. Friend have the time, either in the margins or in bilateral meetings with his United States and French counterparts, to discuss progress in sending peacekeeping troops to Yugoslavia? Is there any prospect of that being acceptable in the Serb-dominated areas of Croatia?

The Prime Minister: No, that subject was not for discussion in New York on Friday, although it is under constant discussion among my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, his fellow Foreign Ministers in the European Community and the United Nations.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): On Russia's debt obligations, will the Prime Minister respond to the urgent pleas in private of President Yeltsin's advisers and consider the suspension of interest payments, at least in the short term? What is the point in giving money with one hand and taking it away with the other?

The Prime Minister: That is a matter for the Paris Club, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and it is best discussed there.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): In addition to the important issues of world citizenship and Government-to-Government relations, will my right hon. Friend consider, in recognising the 100 or so administrative regions within Russia, that it might help to get delegations from the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry and local government at both officer and councillor levels to have seminars in Russia so that people can start breaking down the bureaucracy and make the system better able to deliver what is now needed there?

The Prime Minister: As ever, my hon. Friend has produced an intriguing idea.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Will the Prime Minister reflect on the conditions of the export credit facilities? There seems to be a widely held view that, if the current conditions are maintained, Russia and the other former Soviet republics will not be able to take advantage of those facilities. It is obvious, too, that if the former republics are to revive economically, those export credit facilities must be used soon.

The Prime Minister: That, of course, is a reason why I am pressing for such an early IMF entry and IMF facilities. In that way the export credit facilities can be available not just from this country but from the other western countries that broadly take the same view.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the important role of the International Monetary Fund. In the autumn there were talks leading to some progress that might be made on Russia becoming a member. Was my right hon. Friend able to discuss with President Yeltsin the problems of the Ukraine? The other republics are undoubtedly severely affected by any problems with the rouble. For them, too, a rouble stabilisation fund would have a significant impact.

The Prime Minister: There was no detailed discussion of the position in the Ukraine or other republics because there were sufficient matters to discuss on Russia itself. The subject was touched on generally, and I understand my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Prime Minister believe that the imposition of massive food price rises and mass unemployment on the Russian people, together with his statement that we will spend £23 billion on the Trident missile system, represents anything but a backward step in a world that is already bitterly divided between north and south? What we need are economic and arms strategies that bring world justice and world peace. Do his policies do any of those things?

The Prime Minister: I believe that we are making progress, and so does President Yeltsin. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman dissents.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Did my right hon. Friend have the opportunity to tell President Yeltsin that in 1984 he was a member of the Government's Whips Office urging Conservative Members to vote for the deployment of Pershing and cruise missiles, which resulted in the end of the cold war, a major reduction in nuclear weapons and the election of President Yeltsin? Perhaps that does credit to my right hon. Friend's judgment.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is very ingenious. I did not mention that particular point. Had I done so, I could also have mentioned that some cruise missiles were stationed in my constituency.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I say how much we welcome the death-bed conversion of the Conservative Government to supporting the United Nations—something that we have done consistently? Will he direct himself to answering the question put to him several times this afternoon: how much money does the United Kingdom Government owe to the United Nations? Is it true that the United States owes hundreds of millions of dollars?

On a personal note, may I say, sadly, that I do not care which country the Prime Minister visits so long as he does not come to Stamford Bridge.

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's good humour has been improved by Chelsea's result at Liverpool. It would seem not.

I cannot answer for other countries' arrears to the United Nations, although on Friday I made the point that I hoped that all countries would meet their obligations to the United Nations——

Mr. Banks: What about this one?

The Prime Minister: —including this one; and we do.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend say more about the enormous numbers of chemical weapons held in Russia and the former states of the Soviet Union? Does he agree that their elimination and that of other such stockpiles around the world must be a prerequisite of proper progress in wider world disarmament?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. One of our agreements at the Security Council was to seek a comprehensive chemical weapons ban this year.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the Prime Minister recall that, five months before the start of the Gulf war, one of his Ministers, in an answer to me, refused to strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspections of Iraq on the ground that Saddam Hussein

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

had signed the non-proliferation treaty? As such, the Government had full confidence that Saddam Hussein would not work on nuclear weapons. After that bitter experience, will the Prime Minister assure us that attempts to strengthen the IAEA safeguards will be real and serious and will remove the greatest danger that faces the world now—the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to countries ruled by people such as Saddam Hussein and other paranoid butchers?

The Prime Minister: I draw two lessons from what the hon. Gentleman said. First, at the moment, we are seeking to enhance the status of the IAEA, and, secondly, in view of the uncertainties that the hon. Gentleman set out, I believe he makes a very comprehensive case for this country keeping its own nuclear weapons.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Given the Prime Minister's stated commitment to improving the effectiveness of the United Nations and its agencies, when will Great Britain, once again, play a full and active part in UNESCO, bearing in mind the major reforms that have been carried out to that agency?

The Prime Minister: We play a full part in all the important aspects of the United Nations.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I am sure that the Prime Minister will agree that one of the greatest threats to the survival of President Yeltsin is the fact that people are cold and hungry. What practical help did the Prime Minister offer the Russian oil industry—we have great experience in oil production—to enable it to earn hard currency and distribute its products more efficiently to its own people?

The Prime Minister: On Thursday, we did not discuss the particular question of the Russian oil industry, but there will be continuing discussions between this country and Russia to determine which areas of its economy we can assist. The oil industry may be one of them. In the time available on Thursday, we dealt with macro matters rather than the position of individual industries.

Points of Order

4.21 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance on whether it is in order for the motion relating to the supplementary estimate for £450 million of unlawful expenditure, and the attached pledge to legislate to make that payment possible, to be on the Order Paper and considered by the House of Commons in any way?

The facts are clear and specific. The European Community's Council of Ministers has power to fix a budget and, of course, it has done that. The European Parliament has the power to increase that budget by a specified amount, specified by EC law, and it has done that. However, the European Parliament increased the budget even further, in breach of all EC legislation, as stated on page 8 of the estimate paper No. 182, published by the Treasury. The purpose of the supplementary estimate which we have been asked to consider is to provide the United Kingdom's share of that quite unlawful expenditure, which comes to £450 million.

I am aware that the House of Commons is all-powerful and can, by resolution, do almost anything it chooses. However, if, as in this case, the House is being invited to approve expenditure which is illegal under EC legislation, I suggest our powers simply do not exist. It was made abundantly clear in the treaty of Rome that EC law is superior to our law and that spending has to be in conformity with that law. I suggest that the United Kingdom Parliament has no power to consider this motion. I therefore ask you, Mr. Speaker, to authorise its removal from the House of Commons Order Paper forthwith.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Let me deal with one at a time.

I thank the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) for giving me notice of his point of order, because that has enabled me to look into it in great detail. The situation that he has described has happened before and has been dealt with in the same manner as is now proposed. The point was covered in the second report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee of the 1981-82 Session, in House of Commons Paper 226. The matter is fully debatable tomorrow, and I notice that the hon. Gentleman has already tabled an appropriate amendment. If, however, it were alleged that public money was being spent in a manner that was not in accordance with the law, that would be a matter for the courts.

Mr. Hain: As the custodian of Members' interests, would you, Mr. Speaker, institute an early inquiry into the disturbing spate of burglaries from Labour Members' computers for professional intelligence gathering? Could that also include possible intelligence services' and Conservative party supporters' involvement? If the Leader of the House can make public statements on the matter, why can he not make a statement before the House?

Mr. Speaker: I looked at that article in *The Observer* yesterday. Thefts reported to the Serjeant at Arms or the police are always carefully investigated. If further incidents of theft have not been reported, I suggest that they be reported urgently to the House authorities. I understand that the alleged theft from the hon. Gentleman was not reported at the time.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As I was referred to, may I make it clear that the House authorities investigate all complaints about thefts and, in the majority of cases referred to in *The Observer*, some of which took place some time ago, no request was made for an investigation. It is not possible for me to have those matters investigated if no complaints were made at the time.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I was one of six hon. Members who reported thefts from their offices. The thief, who was a window cleaner, was interviewed at Bow street following traces that were put on my Vodaphone. It is remarkable——

Hon. Members: What is the point of order?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that it is appropriate to go into the method by which the culprit was apprehended.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The point of order for you, Mr. Speaker, is whether it is right that, when a thief is identified in the House of Commons, he should simply be given a police caution at Bow Street and not be charged. When I rang the police and complained, I was told that it was a matter of police discretion and their decision. Is that right? Is not the problem the fact that we do not prosecute? That is why we are not catching and dealing with the thieves.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have no responsibility for the sentences in those cases.

Mr. Tony Banks: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, on Sessional Orders. Last Tuesday, Mrs. Banks drove me to the House of Commons so that I could vote. She then went off to do some parliamentary business and came back to collect me, and when we went back outside we found that Mrs. Banks's car had been towed away by the Metropolitan police. She now faces a fine of £80. In view of the fact that she was conveying a Member of Parliament on his legitimate business, will you, Mr. Speaker, offer some assurance to Mrs. Banks that she will also be protected by the Sessional Orders?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should have complained about that matter last week if it took place on Tuesday. However, it is a serious matter. The House knows that, on one or two occasions, there have been problems with cars left outside St. Stephen's entrance. In one case, we had to allow extra time on a Division because the car was not identified and it was thought that it might constitute a threat to us. Therefore, cars should not be left unattended at that place.

Mr. Banks: Mrs. Banks will not be happy.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Should you not consider the question of stolen disks and tapes with a little more concern, in view of the fact that, the last time a Labour Government looked like being returned to power, before 1974, it was later disclosed through Peter Wright that the security agencies were engaged in trying to destabilise the prospective Labour Government? They continued to do so after a Labour Government had come to power. The matter should be approached with some zeal instead of being brushed off, albeit that some hon. Members may not have reported it to the police. In view of the spate of thefts of sensitive material, it is important that the matter should be investigated at the highest level, particularly as we face an impending general election.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that I need any more help on it.—*[Interruption.]* Order. Will the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who raised the point of order, please listen? Such matters should be reported to the Serjeant at Arms and, if they are, will always be investigated. I have looked carefully at the allegations in the article, and the incidents involved were not always reported.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a separate point of order, Mr. Speaker. Further to the answer given by the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People to questions about Friday afternoon's business and the end of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, will the Speaker confirm that there is no convention or rule requiring any private Member's Bill introduced on a Friday to take up a minimum amount of time before it is put to the vote? That is a matter of concern not only to me, but has been raised by other colleagues. The Minister's answer implied that there was an established convention which meant that the matter could not be determined on Friday.

Mr. Speaker: It was a matter for the occupant of the Chair at the time.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: I hope that this is not a further point of order about disks.

Dr. Reid: It is, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that it will be helpful. I do not want to over-dramatise events, but there is obviously suspicion among Conservative Members that that matter has only just been raised. In my case, there were two reasons why the matter was not reported. First——

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): It was top secret.

Dr. Reid: It was not top secret. I have nothing to hide on my computer—the hon. Gentleman may have.

The first reason was that, in my case, nothing was stolen, although it was obvious that someone had gained access to the computer.

Secondly, it was not until much later that it was obvious, not to me but to my researcher, that the incident was part of a pattern of events which was not obvious at the time. That pattern involved the theft of computer equipment and people gaining access not only to my computer, which does not have a lock, key or password, but to other computers that do. I hope that that explanation helps to show why, even though the incidents were not reported at the time, in retrospect, they may be far more significant than I or others realised.

Mr. Speaker: That may be, but I repeat that, if such incidents occur, they must be reported; otherwise, it is not possible to look into them.

BILL PRESENTED

MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

Mr. John MacGregor, supported by Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. David Mellor and Mr. Tim Renton presented a Bill to establish Boards of Trustees of the National Gallery, the Tate Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery and the Wallace Collection; to transfer property to them and confer functions on them; to make new provision as to transfers to and between the collections of certain museums, galleries and libraries; to make provision for and in connection with the vesting of land in the governing bodies of such institutions; to make provision for the financing of such institutions and of the Museums and Galleries Commission; to make further provision with respect to the giving of indemnities against the loss of, or damage to, objections on loan to certain institutions; to change the name of, and to make further provision with respect to, the British Museum (Natural History); and to amend certain enactments relating to museums, galleries and libraries; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 63].

Nuclear Proliferation

4.33 pm

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): I beg to move,

> That this House, recognising the potential dangers of the rapidly changing world order, welcomes the recent proposals for substantial reductions in nuclear weaponry, the growing support for the non-proliferation treaty and progress in the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions concerning the dismantling of Iraqi nuclear, chemical and biological capabilities; urges the Government to play their full part in helping the relevant authorities in the Commonwealth of Independent States to dismantle their nuclear devices, to safeguard their nuclear components and to discourage the proliferation of nuclear expertise; and believes it is of the first importance that Britain retains an effective and credible minimum nuclear deterrent as security in a world where there remain many sources of instability.

A year ago we were at war in the Gulf; victory was still a month away. It is a mark of the speed of events that Iraq, despite remaining unfinished business, should be succeeded so quickly by other more pressing items on the international agenda—the splintering apart of the Serbs and Croats, and the break up of the Yugoslav federation, with serious loss of life and destruction of property. Then there was the internal coup against the authority in the Soviet Union and President Gorbachev, leading to his retirement from the world stage. There was also the attempt at Maastricht, against the trend of these events, to create a federal union within the European Community; and the emergence of the state of Russia, under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, as the dominant partner and major force in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

All these developments have occurred within less than 12 months. The world is showing a remarkable degree of volatility. That not everyone has come to terms with this is only too clear from the criticism of Mr. Yeltsin in recent days that he is "unpredictable". That criticism was renewed after his sudden two-day disappearance recently to deal with the question of the allegiance of the Black sea fleet and the future of the Crimea. When events themselves are so unpredictable, how can the men who seek to match them be otherwise?

Despite this succession of dramatic developments, we should not lose sight of the significance for collective security and for the future of the United Nations of the successful conduct and conclusion of the war against Iraq.

My first interest in politics was triggered by a sixth form conference organised under the auspices of the United Nations across Parliament square in Central hall. So the United Nations' existence over more than 40 years is almost contemporary with my own active life.

Inevitably, the United Nations had inherited from my father's generation a legacy of hopes betrayed by the League of Nations—a post-war, weary disbelief in the idea that international collaboration could ever be effective in practice. And during the United Nations' first four decades there was much to sustain that disbelief. The United Nations' responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security was often paralysed in the Security Council by the single Soviet syllable "nyet". The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation assumed responsibility for the defence of the free world, and the cold war set in.

With the emergence of Mr. Gorbachev and the new leadership of the then Soviet Union, a gradual political warming took place. For almost the first time, the permanent members of the Security Council began to act in concert, and to great effect, notably in relation to the conflict between Iraq and Iran and the associated threat to international shipping, and in the long-running problem of Namibia.

This was the start of the process of change to which the Prime Minister's initiative on Friday at the Heads of Government meeting at the Security Council in New York has given renewed momentum. The perception of that meeting by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)—as a glorified photo opportunity—was a characteristic misjudgment, completely failing to see its significance in this context and once again failing to rise to the level of the challenge.

The earlier changes were the background to the remarkable reaction of the United Nations to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The speed and resolution displayed by the Security Council gave real encouragement to long-dormant hopes of effective international action on security. But before we assume that that example was a firm safeguard for the future, we would do well to recognise the significant coincidence of national interests that made it possible—the skills of the professional diplomats notwithstanding. As one who saw at close quarters Anthony Parsons in action on the floor of the Security Council at the height of the Falklands conflict in 1982, I for one do not underrate the contributions made by our diplomats.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I was hoping that the hon. Gentleman would return to the question of behaviour at the United Nations. Is he aware that, in the 40 years between the foundation of the United Nations and last year, more vetoes were put on Security Council decisions by Britain and the United States than by the Soviet Union and China?

Sir Michael Neubert: That was a sterile comment to make at the beginning of a debate about the United Nations' new role, new powers and new determination. The hon. Gentleman goes into a degree of detail about the history of the past 40 years which I do not intend to pursue. No doubt if he has the opportunity he will give us more of the same.

Four major factors came together in the Iraq conflict. The first was the invasion of a small, virtually defenceless country by its more powerful neighbour. The second was the threat to a large proportion of the world's oil, its principal source of energy and the lifeblood of the modern world. The third was the unbridled egomania of a military tyrant provoking comparisons with the dictators of the 1930s. The fourth, and the most relevant to today's debate, was the prospect of this man possessing long-range weapons of mass destruction.

All these were clear-cut issues on which world opinion was immediately ready to give a majority verdict. Each on its own raised issues of principle on which legitimate action could be justified without difficulty and which was by no means unique. Examples are so numerous as to be commonplace—the small change of international currency—and are seldom the subject of concerted action. The combination of all these factors persuaded the international community that this was a difference of character and not of degree. Moreover, the action that was taken by the United Nations was strictly limited by the governing resolutions and the need to observe these if the 30-nation coalition was to remain intact and the sensibilities of the Arab people not to be offended.

As a result, for many people the task was left in part undone and the peace incomplete—hence the need, for example, for the Prime Minister to take the lead and in particular to undertake the safe havens initiative to protect the Kurdish minority in Iraq. There was no choice. If we were seeking to uphold the international rule of law, we had to observe the United Nations resolutions to the letter. As it was, the ceasefire resolution—Security Council resolution 687—required first the dismantling of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, then compensation for the victims of its aggression, the demarcation of the Iraqi-Kuwait border and the provision of humanitarian relief. That was an ambitious agenda, and it is significant that it is the proliferation factor—the removal of Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological capability—that is proving difficult.

Repeated inspections under the auspices of the United Nations have met with Iraqi obstruction and concealment. It seems clear now that Iraq was much closer to achieving an explosive nuclear device than was previously supposed—perhaps only six or 12 months away. There was a massive, covert nuclear weapons programme under way, including the building of an industrial-scale centrifuge enrichment facility, yet this threat to world peace was only one of four factors that prompted international action. If Saddam Hussein had not invaded Kuwait, proliferation would have proceeded with all speed.

As a consequence of the work of the special commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations must now maintain long-term surveillance and inspection to ensure that Iraq can never again have the capacity to threaten its neighbours with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Our Government must play, as they are playing, an important part in this, with the provision of technical expertise for inspection.

All our worst fears and apprehensions about Iraq were discovered to be fully justified, fortunately in time but only just in time. Much has been learnt about the difficulties of discerning between materials and equipment intended for military use and similar materials for civil use, given the compatibility of much civil and military nuclear development.

The threat of nuclear proliferation, however, is not confined to Iraq. India and Pakistan have significant facilities and nuclear programmes—an uneasy background to the heightened tensions of the sub-continent. In another part of the world, Argentina and Brazil have made recent commitments to nuclear non-proliferation and to bringing all nuclear material in their territories under IAEA safeguards. These commitments are to be welcomed. North Korea and Israel are constant concerns. Algeria, in association with China, and Iran are further examples of countries that have developed nuclear facilities.

Potentially, the non-proliferation treaty can be effective, and the growing support for it is encouraging. However, the Iraq experience demonstrates that it needs strengthening. After all, Iraq was a party to the non-proliferation treaty. Powers of special inspections with minimum notice are essential. If agreements are found to have been breached, the Security Council can take action, as it did with Iraq.

[Sir Michael Neubert]

This brings us back to the importance of the convening, by the Prime Minister, of the New York summit last Friday. That initiative betokens the clear intention to strengthen the United Nations, principally by providing the means for a more powerful peacekeeping role for the UN. There is also at least one specific British reference to strengthening controls against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, in this case in biological warfare, to which the Prime Minister referred in his statement earlier today. New legislation will outlaw named biological agents and toxins as a means of controlling the export of materials that could be misused for military purposes. The post-summit communiqué also extended the UN's role in preventing the spread of technology on nuclear weapons.

The summit was remarkable also for the first appearance at it of President Yeltsin, who has assumed the Soviet Union's former seat on the Security Council and declared himself dedicated to the dismantling of the totalitarian order. History has never seen such a spectacular dissolution of an empire as has happened with the break up of the Soviet Union within the past few months. After all, it occupied one sixth of the world's land surface and breaking it entailed the sundering of no fewer than 16 socialist republics.

It is here that the most acute and extraordinary issues of nuclear proliferation arise. The vast arsenal of Soviet nuclear weapons had to be brought under new arrangements for command and control. Agreement was reached at Minsk on 30 December that President Yeltsin would be the one to be empowered to use nuclear weapons, subject to the agreement of the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine and following consultation with the heads of the other nations in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Given the capacity of that nuclear arsenal to destroy the whole world many times over, it is a remarkably precarious arrangement and, with memories of Chernobyl, not entirely reassuring.

It is imperative that the Government afford all possible assistance to the new independent states in dismantling nuclear weapons—a huge task in itself and likely to take many years—safeguarding the components from falling into the wrong hands and providing alternative livelihoods for redundant nuclear physicists and engineers who would otherwise be a tempting prospect for would-be Saddam Husseins attempting a short cut to nuclear capability.

These are all practical technical measures, but in the political and diplomatic sphere we must also press all the former Soviet republics to join the non-proliferation treaty as soon as they can meet that treaty's obligations. Ten have already joined the conference on security and co-operation in Europe. These and other moves will bring the newly independent republics within the family of western nations, and are welcome. They are the best way to avoid dangerous imbalances of power developing. The European Community must also widen its horizons to take in these newcomers rather than drawing closer and closer into itself.

In the interim, as these processes continue, there will inevitably be instability. In these circumstances, the people of the United Kingdom need a sure defence against all eventualities. That sure defence must include the possession of an independent nuclear deterrent. President Bush and President Yeltsin have made announcements of substantial reductions in nuclear weapons. That is obviously good news, and further evidence of reducing tensions and the end of the cold war. However, it is no reason for us to abandon our strategic deterrent. That remains the ultimate safeguard of our national security. The world remains far too dangerous a place for us to think of relinquishing our plans for the Trident submarine-based deterrent.

We cannot know what future threats may develop. Twice in the past 10 years the unexpected has happened. As always, it is better to be safe than sorry. The admission that Soviet missiles have been targeted on our cities demonstrates the validity of the nuclear argument since the war. These armaments are now to be scaled down by the United States and Russia, as the successor to the Soviet Union, but these are reductions in degree by the two major super-powers. We were never in that league. As an illustration of this, I point out that the proposed arms cuts by the United States alone will save $50 billion—a nice round figure. The sterling equivalent is £27·8 billion—more than our defence budget in total. Even with the most recent cuts announced, the United Kingdom's nuclear arsenal will be only about one fifteenth the size of that of the United States or Russia. If we are to be safe rather than sorry, we must retain our minimum nuclear deterrent. With the evidence of potential proliferation and with unstable characters like Saddam Hussein and General Gaddafi on the world scene, it would be folly to do otherwise.

If deterrence is to be effective, it must also be credible. That is why we are planning a four-boat Trident force to replace a four-boat Polaris force. The fourth boat provides the indispensable assurance that over the lifetime of the force, extending well into the next century, there will always be one boat on station at all times, day and night, deep beneath the sea, invulnerable to pre-emptive attack. The first of these boats—Vanguard—is due to make its appearance at the end of this month. It will carry 16 missiles, each capable of carrying a maximum of eight warheads, and will be followed by the second and third of its class.

But what of the fourth, in the unlikely event of a Labour Government? Its future would be, to say the least, uncertain. But "uncertain" describes the defence policy generally that we would see under a Labour Government. Although the Labour party has already lost at least one general election in large part because of its lack of commitment to a sound defence policy, and although it may attempt to profess otherwise this time—perhaps even this afternoon—its underlying unsoundness in respect of defence has not changed. Its instinct remains anti-military, anti-nuclear and anti-American.

Whereas our Secretary of State for Defence ranks eighth in the Cabinet, the Opposition's spokesman on defence did not even rank election to the bottom place in the shadow Cabinet. Who are the officers of the Labour Back-Bench defence committee, and where are they this afternoon? The chairman of that committee is the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), and the vice-chairmen are the hon. Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan). What do these three have in common? They are all members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. But what is surprising about that? The CND is an organisation that, until very recently, had the support and membership of the Leader of Her

Majesty's Opposition, of his wife and of an estimated 130 members of the parliamentary Labour party, which totals not much more than twice that number. It seems, therefore, that Back-Bench officers are entirely representative of the parliamentary Labour party as a whole. We shall be interested to hear their contributions to this debate.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My hon. Friend will know that the Labour party's Back-Bench defence committee is elected on the basis of a free vote. Does he agree that were the Labour party to have a free vote on this issue its members would again support CND?

Sir Michael Neubert: It would be extremely interesting if members of the Labour party were allowed to vote at all, let alone vote freely, on a defence matter. They avoid the issue by failing to go into the Lobbies. The honest 28 not only state their differences but are prepared to back them by opposing the Government and their own party.

At its conferences the Labour party regularly votes for a defence budget reduction of £6 billion. That is the saving which would result from abolition of the Army, the Navy or the Air Force—which one, the party never says. That being the case, anybody concerned for the nation's defence, for the maintenance of conventional forces adequate to meet any likely eventuality, and all those employed in defence manufacturing industries can have no confidence at all in the prospect of a Labour Government.

The Opposition can certainly claim no credit for the extraordinary events of recent years, which have liberated communist-controlled countries across Europe. As we were reminded only this weekend through documents apparently found in the archives of the Kremlin, the Labour party opposed the deployment of cruise missiles with all the strength that it and its CND friends could muster. Yet it was this crucial trial of strength, when the west stood firm, that brought the Soviets to the negotiating table and precipitated the process that created today's new freedoms and resulted in the collapse of socialism.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Can the hon. Gentleman point to anything—any so-called revelation—in these Kremlin documents that my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) was not saying in the House of Commons at the time?

Sir Michael Neubert: The papers found in the Kremlin simply confirm views that are sometimes known to be held but are very often disowned and are certainly not professed with great conviction in this House or elsewhere.

The ambiguity of the Labour party's position on defence has been evident to the British people for many years, and it remains today. If the Labour party had been in power at the time to which I refer, we should have long ago laid down vital arms. A Labour Government would have left us virtually defenceless in the face of the force of the Warsaw pact. In recent days the German Defence Minister, Dr. Stoltenberg, revealed that the Warsaw pact was not a defensive alliance like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation but had an active plan of attack and had even minted war medals. That danger is now past. How can the Labour party and its fellow unilateral disarmers sleep with their consciences?

There are now new dangers, to which my motion draws attention. Our minimum nuclear deterrent remains the essential safeguard for our independent future. Only the Conservative Government have the necessary conviction and commitment to ensure the nation's defence at all time and in all circumstances. The British people and the House of Commons can rely on them.

4.55 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): The hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) has raised a most important question—in some respects, the most important question arising from recent events in Europe and in the world. Although I disagree very strongly with some of the things that the hon. Gentleman has said and with some of his recommendations, I am of the opinion that it is good for the House to have an opportunity to discuss these matters. Indeed, the House of Commons is probably the best place for such discussions.

I agree with some of the hon. Gentleman's remarks about Iraq. He has underlined the danger that was created for the entire world by the supply of arms to Iraq, which was helped to come close to becoming a nuclear power. I am not sure how close the country came to achieving nuclear status, but I have to say that second only to the dangers involved in the indiscriminate proliferation of nuclear weapons was the horror that the world recently inflicted upon itself by way of the well nigh indiscriminate supply of arms to countries such as Iraq. That was an altogether disgraceful affair, and various Governments throughout the world should bear some of the blame for it.

I am sorry to say that the British Government cannot be acquitted of any fault in this matter. Indeed, the question of the supply of guns and other equipment to Iraq has not yet been resolved, and the Government have demonstrated no eagerness to resolve it. There is no doubt that, up to about a month before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, supplies that might have been of assistance in the acquisition of a nuclear arms capability, and certainly were of assistance in establishing the country as a major military power in the near east, were going to Iraq. In this regard, the British Government do not have a clean record.

I shall be interested to hear what the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), has to say when he replies for the Government. Up to almost the day before the invasion of Kuwait, the Government strengthened Iraq's ability to inflict such horrors on other peoples and, indeed, on its own people. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will comment on that matter, and I hope that, in future, the Government will demonstrate some understanding of the fact that this is a question not merely of dealing with the proliferation of nuclear weapons—a matter to which I shall come in a moment—but also of whether we are now prepared to embark upon a new policy for the protection of the world against the proliferation of weapons that, while not quite as dangerous as nuclear weapons, are capable of inflicting appalling disasters on the world and appalling injury in some countries that suffer grinding poverty as a result of having the weight of armaments imposed upon them.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The right hon. Gentleman will remember that, when the Iraqis gassed some 5,000 people at Halabja, the British Government's response was to double the credit available to Iraq.

Mr. Foot: The hon. Gentleman makes a telling point, and I hope that the Government feel some contrition.

I trust that the Government do not need my next warning, but one can never tell. In view of the common revulsion that was felt throughout the country and the world at the policies pursued by Iraq against the Kurds and others, I hope that there will be no rush to support Iran, as if that is the way to protect the situation.

The Iranian Government's human rights record is as bad as that of the Iraqis. It is worse in some respects, and that continues. The horrors committed year after year, month after month, and almost day after day in Iran are appalling for the world to see. I hope there will be no less strict a refusal to rebuild Iranian military strength than there should previously have been in respect of Iraq.

I know that there was some conflict as to which side Britain should support in the Iran-Iraq war. The British Government made many mistakes at that time, and on the whole supported Iraq against Iran. The Governments of both countries—and many others too—have barbaric human rights records, and committed appalling offences against common decency throughout the world. They continue to threaten our own citizens with death, and even to carry out death penalties against them. I hope that the Government will stress that we must refuse to make any concessions to Iran in the new situation.

Iran, in common with other countries, is seeking to become something of a nuclear power. I hope that that prospect will terrify people sufficiently when they even contemplate it.

The hon. Member for Romford referred also to events on the Indian subcontinent, where nuclear proliferation is one of the most dangerous aspects of the world situation. I was on the Indian subcontinent a few years ago, and again recently. There has been a serious deterioration over the past two or three years in the assessment of what can be done about nuclear proliferation on the Indian subcontinent.

At present, as the Minister knows, the Indian Government do not want to subscribe to any proposed non-proliferation treaty, believing that it would inhibit their rights or possibilities in comparison with Pakistan. When I was in India four years ago and saw Rajiv Gandhi when he was Prime Minister, his main message—which I was to carry back to this country and to convey to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—was, "You must understand the danger of nuclear proliferation and of the nuclear build-up in Pakistan."

He asserted that proliferation was supported by the Americans, and to some extent by the British Government. He warned, "If that is allowed to continue in Pakistan, we will be unable to resist the pressure to match it in India." The same argument is made by people in this country, when they say that Britain must have nuclear weapons to protect itself—and it is used also on the Indian subcontinent today.

If the Indian Government feel unable to back to the full, even in the new situation, a non-proliferation treaty, I hope that we will be able to use British, American, and United Nations diplomacy to overcome that. The United Nations may be able to exert the greatest influence on the Indian subcontinent, and I hope that we will be able to use all its strengths to ensure that the appalling disaster of a nuclear arms race on that Indian subcontinent does not develop. What could be madder than that? India ought to spend the huge sums that would be diverted to a nuclear capability on relieving poverty and all the other evils in that country.

A special effort should be made by the British Government, who still command some credit with both Pakistan and India, to avoid a new arms race in those countries. If the Government are to have any chance of achieving that, they must consider fresh initiatives.

Despite the strength of the argument made by the hon. Member for Romford, it is no use thinking that we can say to Pakistan and India, "You should give up any idea of becoming nuclear powers—but you cannot take a lesson from us, because we are determined to remain a nuclear power whatever happens." It seems that, whatever develops over the next decade or so, the British Government and the motion of the hon. Member for Romford make it clear that we will remain a nuclear power.

If we continue to say that, the Pakistanis and the Indians will not listen to us very carefully. Why should they? They can argue, "If it is such a good form of defence, we will have it too. We will take the lesson from your Defence Ministers." If that happens, the arms race will be on.

The Indian Government are responsible; they are not in the same category as the others that I mentioned in Iran or Iraq—although they may not always show it—in the way that they let off many terrorists, or guide and support terrorist activities in many parts of the continent.

I hope that a tremendous effort will be made to ensure that Britain will use its influence. I do not suggest that we can change our own nuclear policy immediately, but if we are effectively to implement a full policy for stopping nuclear proliferation, we must be prepared to consider our contribution to that process.

Mr. Mans: Why would it be impossible to convince Pakistan, for example, to give up its nuclear weapons unless we do the same? For decades, the right hon. Gentleman has used precisely that argument to encourage Britain to give up its nuclear weapons while other nations retain theirs.

Mr. Foot: It is difficult to persuade any country to surrender its nuclear capability when Britain argues that it is the only defence. It is not. On several occasions in the history of the world British Governments have taken a different and wider view than the hon. Gentleman, who merely says, "Let us go on reiterating the policy that we have followed for years—and whatever happens in Pakistan or India does not make any difference, because proliferation will continue."

The motion of the hon. Member for Romford refers to the non-proliferation treaty. The British Government, rightly, were a strong supporter of that treaty, and claim to be a strong supporter of it still. It is right that we should support that treaty, which bears the signatures of more than 100 nations, and which is the basis on which something bigger can be built.

There would, however, have been no conceivable possibility of such a nuclear non-proliferation treaty had it not been for the preamble, which stated that the aim of all signatories should be the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. Had it not been for that, nations would not have signed the treaty, or urged others to sign it. Now, people are saying, "We should not worry about the preamble."

When I went to see the former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), who helped to overthrow the previous Prime Minister—I shall always remember that wonderful speech he made—he did not seem to understand or accept the fact that the treaty required its signatories to aim for eventual abolition; but that is only common sense.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Worthy though the preamble may be, the reality—as the right hon. Gentleman said earlier—is that some of the countries, such as India, that are now striving to obtain nuclear weapons are not responsible countries. Irresponsible countries will not respond to leadership or example from us, whatever we do. Unless we have some means of deterring such countries from attacking not only us but their innocent neighbours, there will be nothing to restrain the whirlwind.

Mr. Foot: That is the gospel of despair. If such a doctrine is adopted by our country and our Government, there will be no possibility of ending the nuclear arms race. We should be much wiser than that—particularly at what we all understand to be a new moment in history. I am just about the only hon. Member who was present at the 1945 San Francisco conference: I was there as a journalist. That, too, marked a new moment in history. We were trying then to establish a more powerful United Nations, which could wield real political authority in such circumstances. The Labour Government of the day, incidentally, wanted to go a good deal further than the other Governments.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Does my right hon. Friend agree that perhaps the most positive step that the Government could take to prevent nuclear proliferation would be to agree to a comprehensive test ban treaty? When the Prime Minister was asked about that today, he retorted that we needed to improve our weapons. He does not appear to grasp the fact that, if such a treaty were signed, other countries—unless they were given nuclear weapons—would be in no position to develop such weapons secretly. A comprehensive test ban treaty represents one of the most fundamental assets in the prevention of proliferation.

Mr. Foot: I entirely agree. That is one of the biggest gaps in what the Government are now saying. A test ban treaty is one of the means whereby we might secure the more general agreement for which we are aiming. Conservative Members have said that that is impossible, but there have been occasions in post-war history when the world has been more ambitious—for instance, in 1945 and 1946, when we were only beginning to discover the implications of developing atomic weapons. Proposals were advanced from the other side of the Atlantic—admittedly, they were recognised to be one-sided, in that they were not fair to the Soviet Union—for international control of such weapons. Full-scale international control would have been possible if our attitude then had been more forthcoming.

Conservative Members say that people will not listen, and that there is no possibility of persuading them. Some advantages have come about as a result of what has already been happening in the world: for instance, the means of inspection are far better than they were 10, 15 or 20 years ago, when the arms race was at its height, and I have no doubt that they could be developed still further. Moreover, I understand that President Yeltsin himself has issued fresh proposals for full-scale international ownership and control of all nuclear weapons. Such developments were proposed in 1945, and have been proposed on other occasions.

Over the past few weeks, I have heard people talk as though there had never been agreements in the past between the west and the Soviet Union. Of course there have been such agreements; sometimes they were in the interests of the Soviet Union as well.

United Nations resolution 242, for example, still represents the best way of dealing with the middle east crisis. A Labour Government suggested the resolution, which won the support of both the United States and the Soviet Union. So far-seeing was that proposal—advanced in 1967—that it is still seen as the best and fairest way of approaching a middle east settlement. If we set our sights higher, better agreements can be secured; and there can have been no more important occasion for such agreements than the present time.

I have a close connection with many of the controversial events recorded in the most recent edition of *The Sunday Times*. The way in which it recorded them constitutes one of the most shameful acts that I can remember a journalist perpetrating, and that is saying something. Even the editor seems pretty ashamed—and if Mr. Andrew Neil is ashamed, or even partly ashamed, something very degrading must have been done.

It was suggested that my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and I were partially engaged in the shocking, terrible activities that the paper described. Let me say that, if I am to finish up as a red under the bed—if that is to be my last role in political life—there is no one whom I would rather find under that same bed than my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East. For many years, he was regarded as the most powerful anti-Soviet warrior of the lot; the idea that he once yielded—cringed, even—to Soviet power is so absurd that not even Mr. Andrew Neil should have had the nerve to suggest it.

I vividly remember going with my right hon. Friend to Moscow in late 1982 or early 1983, when we had some discussions with the Soviet leaders. At that time, the Russians had put the SS20 missiles in place, and similar nuclear tactical weapons were either in place or being mobilised by the west. What we proposed then was very different from what is described in *The Sunday Times*. We proposed not only that both sides should make reductions in their stocks of nuclear tactical weapons—although, of course, we preferred that option to the option of piling them up, which was being suggested—but, better still, that all such weapons should be abolished, on both sides. In other words, we proposed the so-called zero option.

That proposal was not, however, accepted by the Russians. They put forward some of the same arguments that have been put to me in the debate by Conservative Members. They believed that the only credible defence was that which was based on nuclear weapons. We said that we should go for the zero option and abolish, first, all tactical nuclear weapons, and that later we might also be able to abolish the even more dangerous strategic nuclear weapons.

When we returned to London a few days later, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East and I were furiously denunciated for having made such a scandalous proposal. We were called traitors, or whatever the popular

[Mr. Foot]

term at the time was. We were told that we had behaved scandalously in putting forward the zero option, but two or three days later President Reagan made a broadcast on this very subject in which he said that he was in favour of the zero option.

I went on television, or radio, and said that I was very glad that President Reagan had come round to our view. However, we were still denounced—I forget by whom but it was a junior Foreign Office Minister, the David Mellor of his day. He said that to adopt the zero option would be treachery. However, when President Reagan said that perhaps the zero option was the way forward, there was much more of a welcome for it.

My right hon. Friend and I were the very first to put forward the zero option. So far from it leading to disaster in the negotiations, it helped them forward. That is the true history, although I do not suppose that it would be published if it were to be unearthed in the Kremlin minutes. What is certain is that, if it were uncovered, it would not be published in *The Sunday Times*, *The Sun* or in any other such newspaper. That is why I believe that it is right to recite the facts in the House of Commons. The facts suggest that we are able to use our diplomatic strength and our position as a country with almost as good a record as that of most other countries to serve the peace of the world.

Recently, the Government have shown more enthusiasm for the United Nations. What infuriated India was that, time after time, we voted against proposals for test ban treaties and other treaties, as well as against disarmament and other proposals. Proposals that would have eased the situation were rejected time after time by the British Government, who used their veto, together with the Americans and a few others, or just said that they did not agree with the proposals.

The British Government used their veto not just against the test ban treaty proposal but against the first use of nuclear weapons and similar proposals. It is all on record. Time after time, the British Government voted, by a minority of one, two or three, in the United Nations against proposals put forward not by wicked communists from the Soviet Union—Mr. Gorbachev's predecessors —but by the Indians, the Yugoslavs—as they were then —and many neutral countries that had better ideas than ours throughout that terrible period of the cold war.

I am glad that the cold war has come to an end. Its end is one of the happiest developments in the history of mankind. However, when the Government try to pretend that its end is due to their policies on armaments and the rest, they insult the intelligence of most people who have looked at the facts, as well as the intelligence of all these other nations. They, too, have rights and claims. I know that some Conservative Members believe that the Indians and Pakistanis do not count because they may not yet have nuclear weapons. If India and Pakistan had nuclear weapons, I suppose that Conservative Members would respect them a little more.

We are entering a different world. We want a Government who will provide a new and much more ambitious programme for the United Nations as a whole. The most urgent of all those measures is the establishment of a new non-proliferation treaty, which the British Government must be prepared to sign and implement.

5.24 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) has done the House a service in bringing before the House this unexceptionable motion. He moved it in a measured and well-considered way. I congratulate him on his felicitous drafting. One would expect no less from a former author of the annual blue revue at the Conservative party conference. He has honed his skills as a wordsmith in long, dedicated and effective service in the Ministry of Defence main building in Whitehall.

It is a timely debate which was admirably introduced. In particular, I liked my hon. Friend's phrase "political global warming" when he described the end of the cold war. The global warming process is held to offer potential risks: the break-up of the ice caps and rogue icebergs on shipping lanes. The phrase encapsulates the problems inherent in the ending of old certainties that endured throughout a long and very intense cold war.

Foremost among those uncertainties must be the question of nuclear proliferation. I would argue that this question should lead to a fundamental re-examination by the alliance of old assumptions and outdated defence strategies. It has already done so. However, any re-examination by the United Kingdom—the "Options for Change" exercise represents a preface to that process— must be founded on certain definite fixed principles: deterrence, defence and diplomacy.

Deterrence will continue to be vital in an uncertain world, as it was during the certain dangers of the cold war. For as far ahead as can be seen we shall need an effective, independent strategic nuclear deterrent. However, it will be, as the French chief of staff once described it, "A tous azimuts"—a multi-directional deterrent. The threat may not come, as it did in the past, from the Warsaw pact. It may lie elsewhere. It must, therefore, be an omnidirectional deterrent. I am sure that the choice of Trident is as right now as it was when it was first made at the beginning of the 1980s.

I believe that we shall still need four strategic nuclear submarines—the SLBMs, the Trident boats. My hon. Friend was so right to emphasise that point. Trident will be the minimum effective system. At the same time, it is an ultimate system in a way that no other strategic deterrent can be. It is minimal, because there is total flexibility on the part of Her Majesty's Government in the selection of the number of warheads that will be deployed on the missiles. There is also a certain flexibility over the number of boats that will be on patrol.

There is geographic flexibility over the deployment of those boats, and to which oceans. For example, they might conceivably be deployed in the western Pacific if it were felt that China posed a threat to our interests rather than Russia, or any of the other Commonwealth of Independent States countries.

It should not be forgotten that we are making an investment for a generation. I believe that Trident will stand the test of time. I do not foresee Trident boats being vulnerable to interception; nor is it likely that a truly effective countermeasure to the multiple independently targeted warheads inherent in the Trident missile system will be devised.

A geographically mobile system that can be deployed to any ocean is a step forward for our people, compared with, for example, the 1950s and 1960s when THOR medium-range ballistic missiles were based in Britain in a fixed and immobile way and targeted in only one direction.

We shall need graduated deterrence. To that end, it will be important to maintain a tactical element in our deterrent capability. The alliance is rightly destroying battlefield artillery. We are getting rid of our Lance short-range missiles, but we shall need something short of the ultimate deterrent of Trident. I support the Government's determination to keep a modern and credible air-launched deterrence system, which, for as far ahead as can be foreseen, will be Tornado. It is dual capable and, as such, is inherently flexible and, like Trident, with the aid of in-flight refuelling, it can be deployed rapidly to any part of the globe where it is needed. If a threat emerged from Iraq, Libya or Kazakhstan, Tornados equipped with stand-off weapons would be effective deterrents. To be effective, they must have that stand-off capability. The Gulf war showed how necessary it is to minimise our losses and to make it quite clear to the potential enemy that atomic warheads can be delivered. This is another aspect of the deterrent that we are seeking to maintain.

The deterrent must be tactical, mobile, flexible and dual-capable. I have no firm views on whether the missiles should be developed with the French or the Americans, but we shall need them. I am pleased that, so far at least, the Government have shown no intention of getting rid of that option.

More emphasis will be placed on defence in our security planning. It is an aspect that we have neglected in favour of offence in past decades. We shall need to enhance and improve confidence-building measures. I applaud the initiatives that are being taken by the Western European Union to persuade west Europeans to develop a surveillance satellite system that can give early warning of potential risks and conflict and of the build-up of chemical or nuclear armaments. I hope that the WEU will go ahead with the construction of such a satellite system and the associated data processing, that we shall play an important part in it and that we shall extend the hand of friendship to associates of WEU—the new democracies of central Europe such as Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the countries of eastern Europe such as Russia, Byelorussia and Ukraine. Such a confidence-building approach has much to commend it.

For the purposes of early warning and to sustain confidence and intelligence, we need to follow up the ideas mooted by President Bush and now by President Yeltsin of creating a space-based strategic defence system. It is hard to know how the world will look in 10, 15 or 20 years' time, but there will always be a risk of a rogue state's emerging, developing a nuclear potential and releasing a nuclear weapon. We will not necessarily wish to retaliate in kind, but if we are on the receiving end we will most certainly wish to intercept its missiles. "Global protection against limited strikes" and other missile defence concepts being developed in the United States should have the support of west Europeans and I hope that they, the Russians and other interested parties of goodwill will work together to make those concepts a reality.

We shall also need not only an umbrella over the top and confidence building, but point defence. We saw in the Gulf war how important the Patriot system was against Scud attacks. If one can imagine what it would be like to be on the receiving end of a missile attack not only with conventional warheads but nuclear or chemical warheads, one can comprehend the necessity of building effective point defences. Perhaps something like the Patriot is required. Lockheed is developing a theatre air defence missile system, and such systems will be necessary to ensure security so that in the event of a rogue attack we do not have to launch a dire nuclear retaliatory strike.

The third aspect of my remarks will be directed to diplomacy and constructive dialogue with potential adversaries to ensure that the right climate of understanding and goodwill is maintained. Collective security systems have stood the test of time in the post-war world—NATO above all, but also, for the duration of their existence, the Central Treaty Organisation in the middle east, the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation in the far east and the Western European Union in western Europe.

The United Kingdom should do everything within its power to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of NATO. I particularly welcome the NATO co-operation council to bring into dialogue the countries of central and eastern Europe which belonged to the Warsaw pact. I also hope that the WEU will extend the hand of friendship in that direction.

We require not only collective security but a more effective United Nations. It was most encouraging to hear the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister earlier this afternoon. He reiterated his commitment, and that of the Security Council, to effective peacekeeping and, perhaps more importantly, to peacemaking by the United Nations. He welcomed, at least implicitly, the idea of a more intrusive inspection regime to back up confidence-building measures through reconnaissance satellites and signals intelligence with the proof which on-site verification can bring. I trust, too, that funds will not be lacking to enable the International Atomic Energy Agency to do its work on our behalf.

Last but not least in this process of diplomacy, we must ensure that potential tyrants and aggressors do not arm themselves with chemical and nuclear weapons or, above all, with the delivery systems required to further their ambitions by military means. Timely trade embargoes and measures taken early on by the United Nations to prevent potential aggressors acquiring nuclear missile technology and chemical weapons will be needed as never before.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Romford said, it is a more hopeful world. I know that the old certainties have gone, but, please, let not the chancelleries of the west look back with nostalgia to the cold war and the old east-west confrontation. The monolithic Soviet Union with its satellites system and Warsaw pact posed a far greater threat to our liberties than do the multitude of burgeoning democracies which are seeking economic development and greater prosperity for their peoples. I recognise the fact that such a world will be far harder to order, but the best balance of power will lie within the Commonwealth of Independent States. Georgia, Armenia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine do not have any desire for Russia to become over-mighty and expansionist.

We live in a more optimistic world and I am pleased with the initiatives that the Government are taking. We shall continue to need a forward-looking defence policy. I welcome the motion moved so ably by my hon. Friend who has alerted us all to the dangers of nuclear proliferation.

5.41 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Like other hon. Members, I compliment the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) for introducing this timely motion. During the previous debate on nuclear defence, on a Government motion on 14 January, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said:

> "I feel a sense of disappointment that there is nothing in the motion about how we might limit nuclear proliferation."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1992; Vol. 201, c. 851.]

This motion corrects that deficiency and allows us to respond more generally to the enormous changes in the former Soviet Union which present us with not only huge opportunities but large, tangible risks.

The situation requires us all to review our defence position and, likewise, our aid commitments. I think that whatever the result of the election, there will be a further defence review afterwards, but the urgency of aid brooks no delay and that was reflected in what the hon. Member for Romford and other hon. Members have said.

Time is very limited and I shall confine my remarks to five brief points. Hon. Members can say, "At least he is on his fourth point" and feel some relief. I was always told that to say, "Finally" and "In conclusion" several times was the thing to do because that encouraged optimism among one's listeners.

First, if one is interested in non-proliferation, one must surely deal with the question of the test ban treaty. We cannot get around that. I heard the Prime Minister say this afternoon that he has no intention of doing so, but it should go on record that my party—its members are here in spirit, at least, in great numbers—does not take that view. Indeed, many others believe that pressure for some agreement and the effective monitoring of it is essential.

Secondly, as the hon. Member for Romford said, the monitoring of nuclear activity in Iraq was not especially successful, despite the fact that Iraq had signed the non-proliferation treaty. Despite the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency, developments occurred about which we knew nothing. Therefore, it is essential to improve monitoring and to reach a situation in which the international authority can investigate where it wishes at will. I wonder what the Government's view is on that point, because it is an important one.

We must also consider how to co-operate in dealing with what might be described as the nuclear risk and the question of fissionable material coming from Iraq if it is recovered. That issue is of direct interest to my part of Scotland in view of the reprocessing which is done and has been done for many years at Dounreay in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). Therefore, I take this opportunity to put it on record that in agreeing to help to deal with the Iraqi problem the Government took the right decision.

However, that was not the view of the Scottish National party, which is much in the news these days. On 8 October 1991, an article appeared in my local newspaper, the *Inverness Courier*, under the headline "SNP vows to stop Iraqi nuclear waste". It stated that the SNP candidate warned:

> "The Scottish National Party would be prepared to use civil disobedience to stop Iraqi nuclear waste coming to the Highlands for reprocessing".

However, the candidate's mother went considerably further. She declared that reprocessing would go ahead only "over my dead body". I am not sure whether that is an extreme form of civil disobedience. I draw attention to it because, in view of the SNP's claims to international status, it is important to remind the SNP that international status involves international obligations.

Thirdly, it is estimated that in what was the Soviet Union there are about 5,000 atomic scientists who have sufficient knowledge to help in the development of nuclear weapons. As the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) said, many other countries are anxious to obtain the expertise of those Soviet scientists, not only maverick countries such as Libya or Iraq, but India and others. I understand that President Yeltsin has proposed joint action between Russia and the United States with a view to a common star wars project which would have an effect on the whole world and which could be used to absorb all of those scientists. I hope that that plan goes ahead. If not, the Russians should not be too hesitant about using immigration procedures to prevent scientists leaving to go to such countries.

I remember being in the former Soviet Union a couple of years ago talking about the Jewish refuseniks. The line of the then Soviet Administration was to not let them out because they were security risks. In this case, the Soviet scientists leaving the country are a security risk not only for the Soviet Union but possibly for many other countries.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I entirely understand the hon. Gentleman's point, which has some force. However, I am sure that he will acknowledge that such controls could be used as a cover for denying exit visas to many people who do not pose the risk that he describes. We must be cautious about advocating such a course of action.

Sir Russell Johnston: I do not quarrel with that. Of course, such risks would exist. I am saying merely that it is terribly important for us to consider the possibility of scientists skilled in atomic matters leaving to go to countries which undoubtedly have plenty of money to attract them and which want their help in developing atomic weapons.

Fourthly, I rather disagree—in fact, I disagree—with what the hon. Member for Romford said about the integration of political and defence questions in Europe. It was one of the notable failures of the Maastricht conference in which the Government unfortunately played such a prominent part that we did not succeed in moving towards a common defence policy in the European Community. The proposition was in no way intended to undermine NATO—it was a question of making the European part of NATO function better. For example, the German Government deeply regret that failure, as I heard Gerhard Stoltenberg, the German Defence Minister to whom the hon. Gentleman referred, confirm in Bonn as recently as last Wednesday at a Western European Union meeting.

Sadly, one can already see the nationalist stand-off position adopted by this country finding an echo in the German public. It was uncovered by a recent opinion poll which showed that the Germans were moving in a nationalist direction as well. I pray that we shall not look back on Maastricht as an enormous opportunity missed, although I fear that there is a danger that we may.

We shall have more co-operation through the Western European Union, as the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) said. That will lead us inevitably to address the nuclear question both in this country and in France.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East said on 14 January:

> "It would be morally indefensible to continue to deploy nuclear weapons if there was no justification for doing so. Nothing would be more reprehensible than to indulge in an intellectual scramble to create some ex post facto justification for weapons that it had already been decided to keep. The deployment of nuclear weapons can be justified only if it is appropriate to the risk."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1991; Vol. 201, c. 852.]

I agree with that.

Hon. Members may remember that in the days of the Liberal-SDP alliance my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who was then leader of the Liberal party, and the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), who was then leader of the Social Democrat party, went to Paris to talk about whether there was a possibility of achieving some rationalisation between the French force de frappe and the British nuclear deterrent. I can remember more recently listening to the then French Defence Minister, Mr. Chevenement, arguing strongly for that because he was a great proponent. He wanted those two deterrents eventually to become a European deterrent. His enthusiasm for the idea was matched only by his failure to be specific about how that was to be achieved. Nevertheless, he was politically enthusiastic and we shall have to consider that proposition. It may be difficult, but it will have to be considered.

Fifthly, the Liberal Democrats accept a minimum deterrent even if, from the political and cost points of view, that suggests at some time ahead coming together with France in a European context. One must always keep that under review. We fail to understand why we should be committed to increasing our nuclear firepower with more nuclear heads on Trident than was the case with Polaris, especially when Trident is more accurate than Polaris.

I have not mentioned chemical and biological weapons, not from a lack of realisation of their great importance and of the enormous difficulty in monitoring them, but simply because of time pressures. The United Kingdom has, after all, a good record on chemical weapons about which we rightly speak. However, rather than claiming all the credit for the United Nations arms sales register, we should realise that it was proposed by Genscher on behalf of the Federal Republic in 1980 or 1981—certainly a decade ago.

I conclude by reiterating my view that, thanks to the hon. Member for Romford, this has been a useful debate at an important time. As an election is extremely near, it may also be the last occasion on which we hear a speech from the most compelling orator in the House whom I can remember and probably the most compelling orator in the post-war period. I refer to the right hon. Member Blaenau Gwent, whom I shall always think of as the right hon. Member for Ebbw Vale. I salute him. I have often disagreed with him, but his rhetoric was always brilliant and sometimes savagely funny. I doubt whether the House has ever known a greater gentleman.

5.53 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) on calling this debate, because it is extremely timely. We must consider two significant issues: first, the state of British public opinion and, secondly, our assessment of the threat.

There is a growing belief in this country that, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, we face no threat in the area of defence. That is exemplified by early-day motion 593, tabled by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and by the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) among other left-wing luminaries. It calls on the Government, among other things, to

> "respond by withdrawing Polaris and replacing the Trident programme with a programme of peaceful investment."

It is clear that Labour Members will push that superficially attractive line with all the enthusiasm that they have long put into the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and all its works. We must realise that siren message, which must be refuted.

A debate on the subject five years ago would have achieved a consensus of public opinion, which might not have included Labour Members. The threat was clear: it was from the Soviet Union, which had a capability of 27,000 nuclear warheads and the means of delivery. Today, things are different politically, but the successors of the Soviet Union still have that capacity. We should ask ourselves where the 27,000 warheads are. They are spread out across Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Byelorussia. They are only now going through the slow process of withdrawal to Russia and towards being dismantled.

We should ask ourselves who is in control of the vast nuclear array. The leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States agreed at their conference in Minsk on 30 December that the decision to use nuclear weapons would be taken by President Yeltsin with the agreement of the leaders of Byelorussia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, and following consultation with the heads of the other member states of that commonwealth. How reassuring is that? It relies on the amity between the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the submission to authority by the military leaders.

The debate is especially timely because of the meeting tomorrow in Minsk between President Yeltsin, President Kravchuk and the other leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The auguries for that meeting and for the future are not good. Last week, President Yeltsin stood up the middle east peace conference and the Japanese Foreign Minister to fly to Novorossiysk to sort out Russo-Ukrainian disagreements over the Black sea fleet.

Ukraine's leader, Leonid Kravchuk, has been hard-line over the allegiance of the Black sea fleet, and he may take a similar line on nuclear weapons within his own territory. There have even been rumours of a blockade of the fleet at its base in Sevastopol unless it submits to Ukrainian control. It is worth remembering that Sevastopol was Russian until 1954 when the Crimea was administratively transferred to Ukraine by Khrushchev, himself a Ukrainian. All that is a source of instability.

How stable is President Yeltsin himself? We read almost daily reports of indiscipline and even mutiny within the red army. We read reports of sales of supplies, equipment and even munitions by the men in that army. For how long will the red army put up with the crumbling

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

of its world and all it believes in? Last August, we saw a revolt by the old guard of the Communist party, a trembling, nervous coterie of boozers, who failed to have the nerve and efficiency to carry the coup to a successful conclusion. Who can doubt that in the high command of the Soviet armed forces there are officers who have both qualities? A real and coherent threat could rapidly re-emerge.

We are quite rightly doing everything possible to assist President Yeltsin. Earlier today, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister described the considerable steps which this country is taking to assist. In defence, the Prime Minister has announced that we have agreed to co-operate on handling surplus Soviet nuclear weapons and safeguarding nuclear materials, and that we will send a technical mission to Moscow to assess the immediate needs at first hand.

Furthermore, my right hon. Friend told us that this country has agreed to co-operate in other areas of defence, including on the transformation that is required to ensure the restructuring, control and financing of armed forces in a democratic society. He has offered to second a small number of Ministry of Defence officials to the Russian Ministry of Defence.

It may be that a steady multilateral reduction in nuclear weapons will allow us to wind down our own independent minimum deterrent but, in the meantime, it would be absolute folly not to maintain that deterrent. We should be clear about what is meant by a "minimum nuclear deterrent." Unlike both the United States of America and the old USSR, Britain has consistently followed a policy of minimum nuclear deterrence. For that reason, the size of Britain's nuclear arsenal has never been related to the size of those of the super-powers. To do so would be to make a false analogy. This country's policy has been determined by one consideration alone—to possess the minimum number of warheads required to inflict unacceptable damage, in retaliation, upon any would-be nuclear aggressor. The definition of "minimum" must relate to need.

The prospective firepower capacity of Trident has come in for a good deal of unjustified criticism. It is misleading in the extreme to claim that, if Trident is a minimum nuclear deterrent, Polaris must be inadequate. Polaris is, indeed, adequate in 1992, but Trident is to be operative until well into the 21st century and, throughout its long shelf life, must be capable of deterring any aggression, especially nuclear. That is the reason for its having a greater firepower than that possessed by Polaris.

Labour Front-Bench spokesmen have unequivocally claimed that they support Trident, but do they? In a debate in the House on 14 January, the Labour party was invited unequivocally to support nuclear deterrence and the introduction of Trident. When it came to the vote, the vast bulk of Labour Members abstained on the orders of the party leadership, while a brave 28 hon. Members, led by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), voted with their consciences against nuclear deterrence and sound defence. Given that the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) says that he is aiming for a majority of 20 seats after the next election, it is obvious that any future Labour Government would be held to ransom by the die-hard unilateralists who regard unilateral nuclear disarmament as an article of faith.

It was the right hon. Member for Chesterfield who claimed recently:

> "if we can change our minds to win an election, we can change our minds back again afterwards".

We should be warned clearly by that statement. The likelihood of a robust and firm stand is in question when 17 members of the shadow Cabinet have anti-nuclear backgrounds, in a party with a notable unilateralist tradition. It is noteworthy that 75 per cent. of Labour Members standing for re-election have anti-nuclear or unilateralist backgrounds.

The message that must ring out from this House must be, "Stand firm and do not drop your guard, least of all against the background of the turbulent world that we have at present." One day we may reach a world in which multilateral disarmament achieves the total and absolute elimination of nuclear weapons. We must work towards that honourable goal, but in the meantime we must be prepared against any eventuality.

6.3 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I should like to associate myself with the generous tribute that was paid by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). I well recollect the afternoon when our mutual friend, the late Leslie Hale, who was at that time the Member of Parliament for Oldham and no mean orator himself, listed as one of his pleasures in the House of Commons for 30 years listening to the two right hon. Members for Ebbw Vale. I say no more on that subject other than to associate myself with those who have commented on the respect in which my right hon. Friend is held because of his contributions to Parliament.

I address myself simply to that part of the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) which

> "urges the Government to play their full part in helping the relevant authorities in the Commonwealth of Independent States to dismantle their nuclear devices, to safeguard their nuclear components and to discourage . . . proliferation".

I have never been more concerned about nuclear matters as a champion of nuclear power than about the prospect that we now face of all those nuclear weapons —I do not know whether they number 27,000 or more and, more importantly, nor do the Russian authorities—being in the Soviet Union when the people who are supposed to maintain them are, so we are now told, going off to jobs in Iran or other parts of the middle east. Such being the bureaucracy of those places, I am informed that those people have not even told their successors of the location of the maintenance manuals. That constitutes a highly dangerous situation.

I should like to put a number of specific questions on this issue to the Foreign Office. The problems that were discussed recently in *The Guardian* article may be overstated, but we do not know of any technical reasons for a time limit on the safe dismantling of nuclear weapons and disposal of the materials. The sealed ampoules, which were referred to in the articles, may contain compounds of tritium, which has a half-life of approximately 12 years and is likely to require them to be refurbished in nuclear weapons from time to time.

As someone who is speaking in good faith and who has a general knowledge of nuclear physics and experience of handling radioactive materials in a civil nuclear environment, I believe that that begs a question that concerns a number of serious people. I ask for a Foreign Office answer.

Secondly, in the event of an explosion of the conventional trigger mechanism during the dismantling of the weapons, it is extremely unlikely that a nuclear explosion would occur, but the conventional explosive mechanism could spread contamination, although its extent would be reasonably limited. That means that a few kilometers might be reasonable. As well as the spread of radioactive materials, toxic compounds such as beryllium would be a problem in such an event. If it is the view of the British authorities that there would be such a problem, what constructive help can we give?

Thirdly, we in Britain are not aware, as far as I know, whether suitable facilities exist for dismantling such a large number of weapons in the Soviet Union. The United States has a suitable plant at Plantex Amarillo in Texas, but whether the Russians have addressed that problem is deeply questionable. How can we ask them to dismantle weapons if they do not have the technical facilities to do so?

Fourthly, the west could provide assistance in dismantling the weapons by providing the necessary expertise or finance to allow the Russians to retain their existing experts. It is important to ask the Russians what is happening to their experts. If they are going off to the near east or leaving for other jobs so that they can keep their families—it is difficult to blame them at a human level —in the interests of humanity it is important that some of the maintenance engineers remain at their posts, looking after what they are charged to look after. Facilities such as Dounreay or Burghfield could play a part.

Fifthly, after the weapons are dismantled, the materials would have to be stored or processed. Both options involve risks of criticality incidents, radiation hazards for staff and the potential for the spread of radioactive contamination. Those problems are, however, well understood and can be avoided by the application of suitable controls. Are we doing anything to help to provide those suitable controls?

Sixthly, the disposal of the weapons should be subject to international safeguards, which should include verifiability via independent audits of the materials during storage or reprocessing to ensure that nothing is lost. My information is that a great deal may be lost—and that would be dire.

Seventhly, a high level of security will be required to protect the materials from terrorist activity. It is not only terrorist activity; it is the possibility of nuclear theft by people who are simply desperate to provide themselves with money to feed their family. This is an urgent, crying problem.

Eighthly, safeguards will be required to ensure that the dismantling and disposal processes are irreversible. What monitoring do we have?

Ninthly, since weapons are generally refurbished worldwide, experience of the technology required to dispose of the nuclear weapons material on this scale is limited, for obvious reasons. It is likely to be in demand as, for example, the Americans dismantled their weapons.

There appear to be no insurmountable difficulties in constructing facilities for the ultimate disposal of the weapons material. It should be possible to blend it with other materials to construct fuel for use in civil reactors. In this respect, highly enriched uranium can be blended with natural uranium to make some reactor fuels into plutonium, which could be used in mixed oxide fuels. The question is whether we can use our fast reactors.

There are a number of hopeful signs. One is the honourable part that Scottish Nuclear is playing in solving the civil nuclear problems of the Soviet Union. Scottish Nuclear has a successful twinning exchange with Russia, which has been established between Smolensk and Torness. A continuing programme of technical exchanges is being developed. A protocol agreement between the two stations was signed in November 1991 which establishes an exchange of work experience between the two power stations, involving exchange visits by staff over a period of six months in 1992. A party of Torness staff spent a week in Smolensk during September 1991 and a return visit to Torness was made by Smolensk staff in November 1991. What do the Government intend to do to provide more resources and finance for such highly desirable exchanges?

Equally, with the Ukraine, contact has been established with a leading nuclear engineering institute in Kiev. Most urgent of all may be Bulgaria. The World Association of Nuclear Operators is exceedingly concerned about Kozlodui. John Hall, a Scottish Nuclear engineer from Hunterston on the outage assistance team there, has been asked to head up the section responsible for the requalification of units 1 and 2. The work performed by the WANO to improve operating standards at Kozlodui will be funded as part of an £8 million European Community aid package to the Bulgarian nuclear industry.

In partnership with the National Nuclear Corporation, Scottish Nuclear has agreed to provide technical assistance to the Energoproject, the Bulgarian nuclear design and construction organisation, for its nuclear programme. Together with matters relating to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, this is important work.

A long time ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent did me the honour of making me his science spokesman. I was never able to repay him because of a difficulty over some unrelated matter. As someone who for 30 years has followed scientific matters in the House of Commons, never have I spoken with more concern than I do about the stability of the 27,000-plus nuclear weapons that are floating around eastern Europe.

6.13 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I welcome the reduction in nuclear weapons agreed by the United States and the former Soviet Union. The debate, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert), is most timely. The subject of the debate is the best ways of preventing nuclear proliferation.

Earlier the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) talked about reducing areas of instability, for example, on the Indian sub-continent. There is, indeed, tension between India and Pakistan. We should address its causes to see whether we can use our good offices to reduce that tension.

For decades one of the main bones of contention between India and Pakistan has been Kashmir. The United Nations resolution of 1949 that the people of Kashmir should have the right to their own self-determination is right, just and proper. What could be more democratically respectable than for the people of that unhappy land to have the say-so in their own future?

[Mr. Hugo Summerson]

They should be given that right. If both countries agreed to go along with the will of the people of Kashmir, that source of tension would be removed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I find it difficult to relate the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the motion before the House. I hope that he will relate his remarks to the motion.

Mr. Summerson: I was about to say that if that cause of tension is removed, a reason why both India and Pakistan wish to acquire the bomb will also be removed. We are talking about preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. My point is that if tension between countries can be reduced or removed altogether, the will or what may be seen as the necessity to possess these weapons will also disappear. The removal of tension should equate with the removal of the will to own nuclear weapons.

For a long time, our ownership of nuclear weapons has been in tandem with the responsibility and willingness of all Governments to state clearly that that ownership is only for the purpose of defence. For example, in 1982 the United Kingdom did not find it necessary even to consider using nuclear weapons in the Falklands conflict. It would have been appalling if we had used them. Our nuclear weapons are only for use against countries that threaten us with their nuclear weapons.

The reason why we possess nuclear weapons in the first place goes back to the cold war. To a large extent, the cold war overshadowed the fact that other countries were attempting to possess nuclear weapons. That has always been the case, but the existence of the cold war overshadowed that fact. Now that the cold war is over we can concentrate on the fact that other countries are attempting to acquire these weapons. That brings me back to the subject of the debate. The very idea that a country such as Libya or Iraq should gain possession of such weapons is highly dangerous. If, by some dreadful mischance, they succeed in acquiring these weapons, surely they are far less likely to be tempted to use the weapons against countries that have a massive retaliatory capability. For that reason alone, it is absolutely essential that we continue to possess nuclear weapons in this dangerous, turbulent world.

6.18 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I am sorry that time does not permit me to go into detail on the various ways in which I agreed with the first two Conservative speakers about the need for surveillance, and inspection and the encouragement of non-proliferation.

It was interesting to hear from the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) the reason why Trident is equipped with a far greater number of warheads, with far greater power, than Polaris. He justified that in terms not of meeting the dangers of 1992, but of future, imaginary and as yet unknown dangers. He does not seem to realise that, by the same logic, there is nothing to prevent every other country from adopting precisely the same policy, thereby endangering the world with a grotesque level of proliferation.

Let me tell the hon. Member for Gravesham that I was one of 28 hon. Members who voted against the Government policy, as outlined in a recent debate, and I voted for the Labour amendment. I will take great pleasure and pride in supporting anything that a Labour Government do to bring about peace and to make the world safer. The hon. Gentleman should be in no doubt about that.

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose*——

Mrs. Fyfe: I shall not give way, as time is extremely short.

People want peace and are desperate for safety in the world. The people of the former Soviet Union and of the United States are delighted that, at long last, far less is to be spent on nuclear weapons, because they need that to be spent on social welfare. There is appalling poverty in both those continental masses. Britons want the same.

We should stop this play-acting nonsense of seeking to make cheap political points inside and outside the Chamber. The people of Britain are disgusted at such childish nonsense. They want us to address the issue seriously, so that we can try to bring about peace and a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons held.

6.20 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) on raising the topic of nuclear proliferation, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) said, it is a subject of great interest to the people of this country. This is not a summation, but I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on those bits of his speech which he obviously wrote himself. It is a pity that, towards the end, he padded it out by reading from what obviously was essentially a Conservative central office party briefing.

We have heard many expressions of concern about nuclear proliferation, and justifiably so. The break-up of the Soviet Union has created greater uncertainty than ever before as to the future safe keeping of that vast nuclear arsenal.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Did the hon. Gentleman write this?

Dr. Reid: I wrote it and thought it up myself. I even typed it. I accept that the subject is probably beyond the capacity of some Conservative Members, but not of all of them.

What is more worrying still is the prospect of new regimes, of varying reliability, acquiring a viable nuclear capability in the next couple of decades. Several hon. Members have voiced concern about that. As long as that potential threat exists, there will be a continuing need for Britain to maintain a mixed defence with a nuclear capability included at an appropriate level. That is not the issue in question tonight, even if we disagree on what should be regarded as the appropriate level. The issue at stake tonight is proliferation, a subject which I am glad that the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) addressed.

The issue is vital for three reasons. First, although it was normally assumed that proliferation would be established as a result of new weapons systems being developed by old and established states, old and established weapons systems are now being distributed to newly established states, particularly in the wake of the disintegration of the former Soviet empire. Secondly, it is no longer just a matter of nuclear technology crossing frontiers; we now face the real prospect of nuclear technologists themselves crossing frontiers.

Thirdly, nuclear deterrence depends, as always, on the absolute certainty that a potential adversary will make a rational and logical calculation. Put quite simply, the adversary must understand that any nuclear aggression on his part would provoke a response so unacceptable as not to make that aggression worth while. But what happens when we are faced, as we may be increasingly, with a nuclear-armed adversary who for one reason or another is beyond the boundary of that logic? That is not a possibility that we should dismiss lightly because it affects deterrence and proliferation; nor should we believe that this is only a modern problem.

Mao Tse-Tung gave a chilling insight into the workings of just such a mind. Lest any Conservative Members feel the impulse to run to telephone *The Sunday Times*, I have not personally met Mao Tse-Tung. However, when he met Khrushchev, he said:

> "If the worse came to the worst and half of mankind died, the other half would remain, while imperialism would be razed to the ground."

Thirty years later, we find ourselves confronted with the same type of mentality in the form of Saddam Hussein. Given what he was prepared to allow his people to endure during the Gulf war and what he inflicted on them afterwards, can we have any confidence that Saddam Hussein would have been deterred from using nuclear weapons?

It is for those three reasons that the Labour party remains sceptical about the argument that deterrence alone will always provide a foolproof means of avoiding nuclear holocaust. The possession of nuclear weapons in a nuclear world may be a necessary condition of security, but it is not, in itself, a sufficient condition of security. Better, we say, to prevent potential enemies from acquiring nuclear weapons than to place our trust in the logic of deterrence after the event.

The credibility of the Government's record on defence cannot, despite the efforts of Conservative Back Benchers, concentrate exclusively on Britain's independent nuclear deterrent. It must also include an assessment based on the Government's ability to secure effective measures to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. If we assess that, we soon see that the Conservative party's claim to be the party of defence and security is a hollow sham rather than one of substance.

Last week, it was announced that the Government will draw together a package of measures designed to safeguard nuclear materials in the former Soviet Union and to ensure that nuclear scientists do not sell their services to emerging nuclear weapons states. That announcement came fully three months after the Labour party called for action to be taken on that very issue—three months in which the Government once again dithered and prevaricated. God alone knows what has already happened in the intervening period in the leakage of nuclear technology from the Soviet Union.

Today the Prime Minister gave another example of the Government's attitude. In his statement, he boasted:

> "We committed ourselves to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation and to the conclusion of a chemical weapons convention this year."

However, within minutes, that same Prime Minister categorically stated that we would certainly never confirm the number of warheads we possess. How on earth can we pledge ourselves, on the one hand, to enter a system of verifiable nuclear systems control and, on the other, say that we, above all others, will never tell anyone else how many warheads we have?

On the question of nuclear proliferation, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence are like the three wise monkeys. They do not see the threat of nuclear proliferation, they will not listen to those who warn them of the dangers, and they certainly never speak about what action they propose to take to stop it. The truth is that the Government are not only morally but intellectually bankrupt when it comes to protecting Britain from the modern nuclear threat and providing modern security. They are mentally locked into a security time warp, bent on resurrecting the corpses of yesterday's threats, yesterday's fears and, for good measure, as we saw at the weekend, yesterday's smears.

No one will take those smears seriously, particularly when they come from this Government. After all, on the very morning of the Soviet coup, the Secretary of State for Defence was interviewed on radio, and the interviewer could not believe what she heard. That interview was given before the Secretary of State for Defence or the Prime Minister knew whether that coup would be effective. The interviewer could not believe what she heard and pressed the right hon. Gentleman—before he knew whether the coup had succeeded or failed—by saying that we were not

> "surely intending to do business with a hard-line, eight-man emergency committee who are clamping down as they are today."

The Secretary of State, according to the Tories, is not a cringer, and he is not one to be craven. He replied with all that lack of cringinity and cravenness for which he is famous:

> "Well I've met Marshal Yazov, I think anybody who'd been to the Soviet Union realised people who were there who had their concerns about the speed of the reforms and the tensions and difficulties that they were causing within the Soviet Union".

What a stalwart for the free world! What a shining example to us all of resolution in its equivocation!

The interviewer, who was still surprised, then said:

> "So we have to do business with whoever is in power in the Soviet Union",

to which the stalwart Secretary of State replied:

> "Well we obviously bitterly regret the news that has happened. But we have to look objectively at our own interests".

Those are the words of a Minister trying to parade the Government's patriotism and objectivity with regard to democracy before the British people, but it will not wash.

Nowhere is the Government's time-warped mentality more abundantly clear than when it comes to dealing with a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. The Labour party believes that such a treaty would represent one of the most significant achievements in helping to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology. As it is extremely difficult to develop an effective nuclear capability without nuclear testing, a ban would obstruct those countries seeking to acquire such weapons. As it is impossible to explode a nuclear device of sufficient size undetected, any country breaching the ban would be discovered, thus allowing the international community to take appropriate steps.

The argument is extremely simple. Such a treaty would therefore prove invaluable in preventing the spread of nuclear technology. I do not pretend that it is a sufficient condition of stopping the spread, but it is a necessary

[Dr. Reid]

condition to start the stop of proliferation. Yet the Government have persisted in their shameful opposition to it.

The Prime Minister believes that nuclear testing is essential. I had not understood that he was a nuclear scientist, which may be why his academic past is shrouded in mystery. His claim that testing is necessary in order to maintain Britain's existing nuclear capability is bogus. As J. Carson Mark, the former head of the theoretical division of the Los Alamos national laboratory, whose O-levels are on record, said:

> "The reliability, effectiveness, safety and security of our nuclear arsenal can be maintained without nuclear tests."

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has been arguing that testing is not necessary. Will he reconcile that with the comments of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) who said:

> "Any country which becomes able to manufacture nuclear weapons needs to test them".—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1992; Vol. 201, c. 837.]

Dr. Reid: Precisely. I am coming to that very point. I am glad that the Minister confirms the consistency of our remarks.

The testing of a nuclear component is not necessary, and I have just quoted on that, the former head of Los Alamos who goes on to say that, by testing the non-nuclear components of existing systems they can be maintained in service, but that testing is necessary only for the development and design of new types of warhead or for developing a warhead from scratch. That is precisely what my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton said in the paragraph that the Minister quoted. That is why the Prime Minister and the Government guard testing so jealously, irrespective of its cost in the international scene, or the undermining of our legitimacy in stopping proliferation. They guard it because it is necessary for the development and design of new types of nuclear warheads and new nuclear thresholds.

The debate about a comprehensive nuclear test ban is of added significance, as the refusal of the United States and Britain to accept one is preventing international agreement on measures to strengthen the non-proliferation treaty. We have heard much tonight about what the Government have already done, and the Minister will no doubt say more about getting rid of nuclear weapons. However, on the question of nuclear arms control, the Government had to be dragged kicking and screaming by Britain's allies.

In announcing the package of reductions proposed by NATO last October, the Secretary of State could barely conceal his sulking resentment. In examining the elements of that announcement, we discover that it boils down to the scrapping of two systems that we did not own, the storing of weapons that we could not use, and the reduction of a number of bombs that we no longer have the capacity to deploy. So we might use the paraphrase, in arms control terms, "Big deal."

Those facts, together with the Government's attitude towards a test ban, have proved that they are not interested in preventing nuclear proliferation and have nothing positive to contribute to the process of international arms control. Indeed, their complacency and inactivity pose a real threat to the country's security because Ministers' attitudes betray their real reasons for refusing to act—their contempt for the idea of non-proliferation, which has been shown time and again tonight by Conservative Members' speeches.

On 18 June 1990, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement compared the non-proliferation treaty to the 1938 Munich agreement, and said that those who believed in it were "naive". On 22 November last year, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said:

> "I am not sure that I can see other nations agreeing to the intrusive inspection regimes that will be necessary to find all nuclear systems."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 600.]

In other words, everyone else must open their books, but the United Kingdom is not prepared to do so. The Government's opposition is clear. In mitigation, they point to those systems that they have already got rid of. Before the Minister of State for the Armed Forces arrived —I am sure that he has had many engagements this evening—I was explaining what those amounted to.

How do the Government know that no one else will accept an inspection regime? They base their assumption on their own volition and judgment. They have proved to be one of the most obstructive Governments in the world when it comes to nuclear arms control. It would be naive to expect them to take the lead in strengthening the non-proliferation treaty as a means of ensuring Britain's security. They not only have contempt for it but are guilty of breaching its spirit.

Article 6 of the treaty states explicitly:

> "Each of the parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

I am tempted to ask Conservative Members to raise their hands if they believe in that article, but I shall not embarrass them, because I know from their speeches that not one of them believes in the articles that the Government signed and purport to support. Instead of negotiating for disarmament, as the Government are obliged to do under the treaty, they are guilty of a qualitative and quantitative vertical proliferation of nuclear weaponry by proposing to increase the number of strategic warheads held by Britain from 192 to 512—an increase of 250 per cent.

It seems that the collapse of the Warsaw pact, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the deep unilateral cuts currently being made by both the United States of America and Russia are to have no impact in the Government's defence posture. What possible rationale can there be for this country to embark on such a programme? There is neither logic nor legitimacy in the Government's plans to replace the 192-warhead Polaris system with the 512-warhead Trident system. Either Polaris is a minimum deterrent at a 192-warhead level, in which case the 512-warhead Trident is a massive escalation, or Trident is a minimum deterrent, in which case Polaris falls well beneath the minimum credible deterrent, and the Government's whole posture of deterrence has been based on a lie for years past. They cannot have it both ways.

For years we have been told that we must improve our nuclear arsenal because it counts for so much. Now we are being told by the Prime Minister, as he told Mr. Yeltsin, that we must improve our nuclear arsenal because it counts for so little. Is not that typical of the hypocrisy that the Government have brought to those issues? If their position lacks logic, more importantly it lacks legitimacy. Naturally, under pressure of the need for economic aid, the Russian leadership may accept, for the time being, a British nuclear build-up at precisely the time when Britain is urging Russia to slash its arsenal.

But how long will that last? What moral or political legitimacy can be claimed by a British Government who are intent on multiplying their own nuclear forces in urging cuts in the nuclear forces of Russia, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan or the Ukraine? With what moral authority can a nuclear-hiking British Government urge self-denial on the nuclear-seeking nations of the world—Algeria, South Africa, Argentina, North Korea, India and Pakistan? The answer is none. It is not logical, legitimate or moral for the Government to do so, and they have no authority for such action. No Government has the moral authority or legitimacy to hold a position which, as codified to the rest of the world, is, "Don't do as I do, do as I say."

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): The number of warheads currently in the Soviet Union is 27,000; the hon. Gentleman gave a figure of 512 for the United Kingdom. If the Soviet Union or any other country does as we do and reduces their total to 512, we shall welcome that action.

Dr. Reid: I am not being patronising when I say that the Minister is an intelligent man. He will know that, in placing all the warheads of the Soviet Union together as he does, he assumes a massed attack on Britain not just by Russia, but by Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and every other Soviet republic at the same time. The republics have enough problems trying to unite to run the Black sea fleet without launching a united, pre-emptive nuclear strike against Britain or other bases. The Minister must know that.

The excuses offered by the Minister and the Government for their acts of proliferation and escalation represented by the Trident programme do not stand up to investigation. Even if they did, we should look askance at a Government who say that they are intent on stopping the proliferation of armoury throughout the world when they have done nothing but replicate the appeasement of the 1930s with one of the world's worst dictators.

The Government have sent to Iraq aircraft engines, armoured vehicles, vehicle spares, artillery fire control and artillery boards. They have sent to Iraq's dictator body armour, ejection seats, explosives, helicopter engines, laser rangefinders and long range surveillance. They have sent to Iraq, with love, mortar-locating radar, naval spares, night vision goggles and trainers, pistols, rifles, shotguns, satellite communication equipment, speech scramblers, tank helmets and much more. The Government do all that while stating that they are a Government who wish to stop the proliferation of arms to dictators, and meanwhile their Members make speeches such as those we have heard today.

The Government supplied Iraq with those weapons and propped up a dictator—as did their predecessors in the 1930s—through a policy of appeasement and aid. They need to be replaced by a Labour Government committed to stopping proliferation. We shall freeze the number of warheads in Trident at a level no higher than those currently being carried in Polaris, while entering the long-term strategic arms negotiations. We will declare a moratorium on nuclear testing and promote agreement on a comprehensive test ban treaty with a type verification regime. We shall support the strengthening of the non-proliferation treaty to include intrusive verification and the use of United Nations sanctions against countries found in breach of it. We shall work towards a more powerful and better resourced International Atomic Energy Agency.

Those policies will be allied to a full defence review designed to produce a British defence configuration as a response to the complex nature of today's security problems, not the cosy certainty of yesterday's cold war stand-off, so beloved of the Conservatives. Living in the past may save the Government from having to change, think, and shape new approaches or dream up new slogans or smears. However, it will not save this country's security, and it will do nothing to save the Government at the long-postponed election.

6.44 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): Those who have just listened to the somewhat excitable speech of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) will know that, in reality, and if in power, the Labour party would substantially reduce our conventional forces and almost certainly pursue a policy of unilateral disarmament.

The motion was introduced cleverly and carefully by my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert). The proliferation of nuclear weapons represents a unique threat to international order and security. Therefore, the House should be grateful to my hon. Friend for giving us the opportunity to debate the motion which involves two related, though separate, issues. The first is proliferation, and the second is the need for a nuclear deterrent.

On 14 January this year, the House debated the need for an independent nuclear deterrent. I set out my views then, so in today's debate I propose to concentrate primarily on the subject of proliferation. However, I shall first echo a number of points raised by my hon. Friends on the need for an independent nuclear deterrent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) was entirely right to say that the risk to this country's security has not disappeared. It has changed and is probably less than it was, but it remains. I strongly endorse the remarks of my hon. Friends the Members for Romford and for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson), who urged on the House the need to retain an independent nuclear deterrent. Like my hon. Friends, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Romford, I deeply distrust the Labour party's policy on this subject.

Until recently, Labour Members were, as far as one can judge, wholeheartedly unilateralist. The Labour party fought the 1983 election on that manifesto and the 1987 election largely on such a manifesto. The amendment moved by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) in the debate on 14 January positively deleted the reference to Britain having an independent nuclear deterrent.

In the course of an extremely long speech, the right hon. Gentleman never once uttered a wholehearted commitment to the retention of Britain's nuclear deterrent. I do not find that surprising when I consider that the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), the Leader of the

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

Opposition, was until 1991 a paid-up member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and then allowed his subscription to lapse. In seven of the nine previous years, he resolutely endorsed the key policies of CND, saying that they were his own. I deeply distrust the Labour party's policies on both conventional and nuclear weaponry.

The core of the first part of the speech of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) seemed to be that the United Kingdom was a prime supplier of arms to Iraq, and that we had markedly increased that country's military capacity. That statement is wrong. I do not know what happened betweeen 1974 and 1979, when the Labour party was in government. It is possible that, during that period, when strict rules were not in place, Iraq purchased substantial quantities of weaponry, which it kept in its arsenal. I do not know whether that is correct, but I know for sure that in 1980 Her Majesty's Conservative Government tightened the rules and resolutely placed a total ban on the sale of lethal equipment and ammunition.

Those rules were further tightened in December 1984, when the Government resolved not to supply any material that could increase the military capacity of the warring countries. I do not suppose that there is any country with a sizeable arms industry that contributed less to Iraq than did the United Kingdom. Allegations to the contrary are unworthy of Opposition Members.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) raised a different point that needs more serious consideration—Export Credits Guarantee Department cover. He was right to say that it was increased, but ECGD cover does not constitute a loan. It is not a facility offered to a country to increase its purchasing capacity. It is cover for exporters who are bound by the rules then in place, which I have described——

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: No, I have not much time, and I intend to press on.

Testing was focused on by a number of right hon. and hon. Members—for instance, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). It is important to bear in mind the small scale of British testing when contrasted with that of other countries. Since 1963, the United Kingdom has tested slightly less than once a year, on average. The United States has conducted more than 600 tests, the USSR, as was, more than 460, and France more than 130.

The Government believe it necessary to retain a testing capacity for as long as we have a nuclear deterrent, so as to ensure the safety and efficacy of the device in question. Opposition Members argue that we do not need to test in order to acquire a weapon, and that a test ban——

Dr. Reid *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman had better be careful if he is saying that he does not argue that. What is more, the Opposition argue that a test ban is an essential ingredient in preventing the proliferation of weaponry. I do not believe that this is so. On 14 January 1992, the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill)—he does not agree with his right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton —said:

"There is no longer any need for full-scale nuclear testing. There is plenty of scientific evidence to show that non-nuclear tests—computer simulations and other technical means—can provide adequate information on safety and reliability."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1992; Vol. 201, c. 898.]

I do not entirely agree with that, but one import of his remarks was that a test ban is not a necessary element in preventing the proliferation of weaponry because, as he put it, one does not actually need a test in order to have a crude bomb. The Iraqis proved that point, because they were close to having a bomb without having carried out a test.

Mr. Flynn: The Minister says that the Iraqis were close to having a bomb. I remind him that, when I pressed the Government in April 1990 to strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspections of the Iraqi nuclear programme, the Government said that they had no intention of doing any such thing, giving the reason that Saddam Hussein had signed the non-proliferation treaty. The Minister's predecessor told me that the Government had every confidence that Hussein would abide by his international obligations and not work on a nuclear weapon. The Government were fooled then: who is fooling them now?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman would be better advised to read the evidence more carefully. He will know that the British Government led the pack in strengthening the safeguards. He will also bear in mind the fact that my predecessor, now Secretary of State for Health, had been urging the case for special inspections for some time. I would like to think, although I have not heard confirmation of this, that the hon. Gentleman supported him in that endeavour.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) raised two points of significance, one dealing with Trident, the other with the tactical air-to-surface missile. My hon. Friend was kind enough to tell me that he had a surgery in his constituency and hoped that the House would forgive his absence later in the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood described the Trident system as flexible, mobile and a minimum deterrent. He was right on all those points, and I want to emphasise that Trident is a minimum deterrent. The Government have said that 128 warheads per Trident boat is the maximum. We shall deploy the minimum that is required, which may in certain circumstances be substantially fewer than 128 warheads. We want to be able to load the missile boats with the number that we regard as needed to ensure our security. The maximum is 128 warheads per boat, but that is not to say that that number will be carried.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood also dealt with the issue of a sub-strategic weapon. I agree that it is important to have a sub-strategic weapon, and we must soon make some decisions on the nature of such weapons. We are approaching the time when the free-fall bomb will pass its shelf life. There is a powerful argument for an air-launched missile, and my hon. Friend made it. We are entirely convinced of the need for a sub-strategic weapon, but as yet no final decisions have been made about the nature of the weapon that we will want in our arsenal.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked 11 or 12 questions; I could not do justice to them all now. He based many of them on an article in *The Observer*——

Mr. Dalyell: No, I did not.

Mr. Hogg: Well, some of them anyway——

Mr. Dalyell: No.

Mr. Hogg: Well, I heard the hon. Gentleman refer to *The Observer*. If I misunderstood him, I apologise. Nevertheless, I should like to reply to most of his questions in writing.

In the meantime, I would like to touch on a more general point that he raised relating to the Russians' facilities and the assistance that the United Kingdom Government and others can give the Russians. The Russians have certain facilities; the question is whether they have enough to achieve the dismantling over a reasonably short period, and that is extremely questionable. They have two great problems—with transport and with storage. As the hon. Member for Linlithgow will have heard the Prime Minister say, we are going to send a technical team to Russia, leaving on 10 February, to explore the ways in which we can assist the Russians.

I do not pretend that we stand alone in this. Under-Secretary of State Bartholomew from the United States went with a team a few days ago and carried out an exploratory visit. In this matter, we all need to stand together; we all have a contribution to make and it must be made collectively——

Dr. Reid: The Minister has still not said anything about non-proliferation.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman grumbles, but I am answering questions raised by his hon. Friends. It would have been better if the hon. Gentleman had not spoken for so long.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow was also right about nuclear scientists. There is a serious risk connected with the leakage of expertise. We need to try to assist the Russians and the Governments of the other republics to find ways of keeping their scientists within their frontiers. That is essential, and we shall work with the Russians and others to that end.

On the broader question of non-proliferation, I have not had sufficient time to cover the subject as fully as I should like, but hon. Members are the first to grumble if I do not reply to the points that they have raised, and that is what I have tried to do. For us, the core is the non-proliferation treaty.

6.59 pm

Sir Michael Neubert: This has been a helpful debate, and it would assist the House if we reached a decision on the question.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, recognising the potential dangers of the rapidly changing world order, welcomes the recent proposals for substantial reductions in nuclear weaponry, the growing support for the non-proliferation treaty and progress in the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions concerning the dismantling of Iraqi nuclear, chemical and biological capabilities; urges the Government to play their full part in helping the relevant authorities in the Commonwealth of Independent States to dismantle their nuclear devices, to safeguard their nuclear components and to discourage the proliferation of nuclear expertise; and believes it is of the first importance that Britain retains an effective and credible minimum nuclear deterrent as security in a world where there remain many sources of instability.

Overseas Development and Co-operation

7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): I beg to move,

> That the draft Caribbean Development Bank (Further Payments) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.

I understand that it will be for the convenience of the House if we also consider the draft African Development Fund (Sixth Replenishment) Order 1992.

I bring to the House the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, who was tonight to have been in Angola. However, on her way to Angola she caught an ear infection when in Zimbabwe and had to curtail her visit and return home. She is sorry that she cannot be here, but I am confident that she will be well and back in the House soon.

The purpose of these orders is to authorise further payments to the replenishments to the African development fund and the special development fund of the Caribbean Development bank. In common with similar international financial institutions, the banks have two main lending arms: the bank itself, which borrows in the financial markets for on-lending to its regional members; and the funds, which lend at concessional rates. These are sometimes referred to as the "hard" and "soft" windows respectively. These draft orders authorise payments for the "soft" windows. The United Kingdom was a founder member of the African development fund, established in 1973. Its purpose is to contribute to the economic development and social progress of its regional members.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): How does the Minister know whether funds that are allocated under the "soft" window are allocated to projects that should be funded through that window rather than through the other one?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall deal with that point at greater length in my winding-up speech. For the Caribbean development fund we have an executive who is a board member and for the African development fund we share with three other countries, which include Germany and the Netherlands, a representative who would be privy to these decisions, and we are able to review the situation in the light of those appointments.

The fund is part of the African Development bank group and lends on concessional terms. Its resources are replenished every three years with contributions agreed through a process of multilateral negotiation with donor Governments. These negotiations provide the opportunity for donors to review past performance and agree policy directions for the future, as well as agreeing an overall target for the replenishment and relative burden-sharing among donors. Negotiations on the sixth replenishment of the fund began in June 1990, and were concluded last year. The replenishment that we are discussing will cover commitments made over the period 1991-93.

The agreed replenishment total was 2·65 billion fund units of account, or approximately £1·8 billion. This represented a modest increase in real terms over the fifth replenishment. The United Kingdom increased its share from 3·55 to 4 per cent., a total full commitment of, in today's money, £71·9 million. This sum will be paid in three equal instalments in the form of non-interest bearing promissory notes which will be encashed over a number of years.

A report was drawn up which set out understandings on policy issues which will serve as guidelines for the management of the fund over the next three years. In particular, it was agreed that allocation of resources should be based to a much greater extent than in the past on the performance of borrowing countries. Donors emphasised that, given the demands on concessional resources, it was important to ensure that these are allocated to programmes and projects where they will be used most effectively. Borrowing countries which are pursuing sound economic policies, which are making efforts to reduce poverty and achieve growth with equity, or which are committed to development which is sustainable both in environmental or other terms are those on which the fund should be concentrating its efforts.

With reference to economic management, donors agreed that the bulk of the funds resources should go either to countries implementing adjustment programmes supported by the International Monetary Fund or World bank, especially within the umbrella of the World bank's special programme of assistance for Africa, or to those countries with a sound policy framework.

Sound economic management is an essential prerequisite for renewed growth and development in Africa. We hope that the greater weight given to performance in fund operations will act as a spur to those countries that have not yet begun the process of economic reform to do so as quickly as possible.

Good government is also vital if aid is to provide sustainable development. This includes not just sound economic policies but competent administration, democratically accountable institutions and respect for the rule of law. We emphasised the importance of these points during the sixth replenishment negotiations, and we are encouraged by the extent to which the African Development bank is lending its weight to promoting this concept in its dialogue with borrowing countries.

A second major policy theme in the negotiations was that of poverty alleviation. The obvious lesson that a sustainable reduction in poverty is not possible without economic growth was underlined. So, too, was the need to ensure that the poor get a bigger slice of the benefits of growth, and the need for direct help to the poorest, especially in the provision of basic health and primary education. The bank has set up a task force to prepare a strategy on poverty reduction.

The bank also agreed to initiate work on population problems. Population growth rates in sub-Saharan Africa are among the highest of any region of the developing world. They have reached a rate of 3 per cent. a year. This means that population will double in 25 years, with clear implications for poverty reduction efforts, and of course, pressure on social infrastructure and the environment.

The bank's performance on environmental issues has been criticised in this House and elsewhere. Management has finalised an environmental policy and is now implementing operational guidelines. The bank is also preparing a forestry sector policy paper, and has undertaken to consult with interested non-governmental organisations before this is finalised. Donors asked that environmental impact assessments be provided for all projects which could have a significant effect on the environment and urged the bank to strengthen its professional staffing in this area as quickly as possible.

These measures taken together should considerably enhance the quality of assistance provided by the fund to its low-income borrowers. The majority of these countries are classified as moderately or severely indebted countries. They cannot afford to borrow on commercial terms and add to their crippling burden of debt.

Their debt problems, of course, are being addressed in other ways. The Government have consistently taken the lead in promoting concerted debt relief measures for those poorest countries which owe most of their debts to Governments. I am delighted, as the House will also be, that in mid-December we successfully achieved consensus in the Paris Club to grant improved debt relief to the poorest, most heavily indebted countries. Under these new terms, up to 50 per cent. of eligible debt service will be written off. This important advance is, of course, a direct result of proposals made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, in 1990. The new arrangements represent a good start to implementation of the Trinidad terms, and we shall continue to press for improvements in the terms offered, along the lines of my right hon. Friend's original proposals.

I should now like to turn to the second order. The Caribbean Development bank was established in 1969 and lends only to the Commonwealth Caribbean. There are 17 borrowing member countries, of which five are dependent territories. The United Kingdom and Canada were the two non-regional founding members. For many years the special development fund—the "soft" window—was funded by a variety of voluntary contributions, each with its own conditions attached. The procedure was simplified in 1984 when a unified fund was established.

The main support for the special development fund comes from the non-regional members, whose numbers expanded in the late 1980s to include France, Italy and Germany. Negotiations for the third replenishment were concluded in May last year. The total agreed was $118 million—more than £62 million. That figure may increase slightly as further pledges are received. The United Kingdom's share is £10·6 million—about 17 per cent. of the total. The United Kingdom's share of the second replenishment was £9·3 million, so there has been a significant increase. The replenishment will cover the period 1992-95, and, as with the African development fund, our contributions will be paid by promissory note. We see the Caribbean Development bank as playing a key role in channelling development assistance to the region.

The CDB operates on a much smaller scale than the African Development bank. The island communities that borrow from it are for the most part small and rely on one or two commodities only, and tourism, and are therefore exceptionally vulnerable to market forces. Emphasis in its programme is given to the development of human resources, through education schemes—secondary, technical, vocational, and teacher training in some cases—in co-operation with the World bank. The CDB is a focal point for skilled manpower within the region, and is manned entirely by people from the Caribbean. It also supports projects to diversify agriculture to reduce the dependence on export crops.

Attention is given to the establishment of new enterprises, and the bank recently expanded its lending to the private sector further to encourage local initiatives. The Caribbean islands are in a hurricane belt and are subject to regular storms and severe flooding. To help reduce the effects of tidal waves and regular erosion of the coastline, the bank supports schemes to strengthen coastal sea defences. The Caribbean Development bank is assisting in the economic recovery programme for Guyana. Those are examples of practical ways of helping the small island communities, five of which are still British dependent territories. The special development fund concentrates on the most vulnerable parts of those communities. The third replenishment will enable the fund to continue to provide valuable support to those small but valued members of the Commonwealth.

The funds to be authorised under the two orders thus represent a significant contribution to our efforts to help Africa and the Caribbean. I commend them both to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): As the Minister has said, it is in order for motions Nos. 4 and 5 to be debated together.

7.14 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I want my comments on the role of the African development fund and the Caribbean Development bank to be understood as being in the context of the role of the British Government vis-a-vis the development challenges facing the African continent.

This debate is taking place at a crucial time. The Minister mentioned two particular initiatives that he thought were most important. The first of these is the Prime Minister's Commonwealth debt initiative. Although we have always welcomed this, it must be put in the context of the fact that it is no compensation at all for the Conservative Government's aid cuts. Although debt relief for the poorest countries is a step forward, it is absolutely no substitute for aid. While the Government have been prepared to cancel debts—many of which were not being serviced anyway—they have cut aid, as a percentage of gross national product, to the lowest level on record: 0·27 per cent. last year, compared with 0·51 per cent. in 1979 under the last Labour Government. In 1979, under Labour, Britain's contribution as a percentage of GNP was the second highest in the group of seven richest countries; now Britain's contribution is the second lowest. While the Governments of African countries may be paying out a little less in debt servicing, they are no better off if less is coming in by way of aid.

The third world has lost £10 billion because of cutbacks in aid as a percentage of GNP from the 1979 level under Labour, which was 20 times the maximum estimated debt relief under the present Government's new scheme. The Prime Minister's initiative is too limited, and Britain has failed to secure the agreement of its international partners, especially the United States of America, on the issue. The initiative applies only to country-to-country bilateral debt; it does not apply to amounts owed to the international institutions. In fact, the Government actually blocked a proposal that debt to the European Community be written off. A Labour Government would press for such agreements.

The initiative does not apply to amounts owed to the commercial banks. The Government have a hands-off approach to the commercial banks, while granting them

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

large amounts of tax relief in respect of these debts. During the Committee stage of the Finance Bill of 1991 Labour pressed for the withdrawal of this tax relief if banks did not write off the debts.

The initiative applies to only a small group of the poorest countries. Other very poor countries, such as Ethiopia, are not included. Many millions in Africa still face famine. Only this week the United Nations appealed for an extra $621·6 million for emergency operations in the Horn of Africa. The total pledged by donors so far is only three quarters of what is needed.

Long-term poverty is also on the increase. In a relatively optimistic projection the World bank estimates that, on the basis of present trends, the number of people in Africa living in absolute poverty will rise from the present 180 million to 265 million in the year 2000. In that time the continent's share of the world's poorest people will double—rising from 16 per cent. to 32 per cent. Before the Minister congratulates the Prime Minister again, perhaps he will bear those figures in mind.

The Minister stressed also the importance of population policies, but in a parliamentary answer that I received today, the Government admit to massive cuts in funding to key United Nation agencies. The United Kingdom's 1990 contribution to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, for example, was cut by 65 per cent. between 1979 and 1990. While the Prime Minister espouses the Government's support for the United Nations, in reality they have savaged Britain's contribution to key United Nation agencies with proven track records. The Minister ought to review the figures before stressing the importance of policy initiatives that the Government have been particularly tardy in supporting with cash.

As we debate tonight, 23 million people's lives are at risk in the Horn of Africa. The urgent appeal to the international community has yet to find receptive ears. The intensifying of internal conflict, breakdown of law and order in parts of the region, massive population movements, and continuing drought-induced famine in some areas are taking their toll.

The eye of the storm must be Somalia. The Prime Minister's fine words this afternoon about the United Nation's newly enhanced role as peacemaker in the new world order must be tested against Somalia's pressing case. Many Somalians who for months looked to Britain, with all her historic links with that country, to take a leading role in the peace process were disappointed with the Government's reluctance and unimpressive response. Although the recent United Nation resolution is a welcome sign of a vigorous approach, I am sorry that it did not feature more prominently at the recent summit.

The appalling suffering of the people of Somalia and the impact that it is having across the region must be a top priority for the United Nations. The world's attention has focused on the needs of the Commonwealth of Independent States—the former Soviet Union. I do not deny the necessity for action there, but Africa's desperate needs have not gone away. The imperative for action is all the greater because so many opportunities exist among the gloom. In some areas, the problems to which the United Nations Secretary-General is pointing are, with cruel irony, caused by improvements to security and good government—such as that seen in Ethiopia—that are allowing people to return to their homes. It would be an even greater tragedy if support were denied to help the thousands of refugees who are returning to their homelands after years of war and exile.

The immediate crisis is being played out against the background of Africa's prolonged economic crisis. According to the World bank, incomes per head in sub-Saharan Africa fell by 2·2 per cent. a year between 1980 and 1989. Excluding those in oil-rich Nigeria, most Africans are by that measure worse off today than in 1965.

There have been enormous external economic pressures on the continent. A steady decline in Africa's terms of trade in the 1970s was severely compounded by a drastic fall in the purchasing power of the country's exports of more than 40 per cent. between 1980 and 1986. Debt problems have mounted. More than one fifth of Africa's export earnings are swallowed up in debt servicing. That level would be much higher were it not for constant rescheduling and the continuing build-up of arrears.

Against that background, there is in parts of Africa clear evidence that long-term malnutrition is on the increase, while average lifespans and primary school enrolment levels are decreasing. Internal factors, including autocratic government and internal mismanagement, play a significant part. Nevertheless, there has in recent years been a remarkable, continuing trend towards economic reform and democracy. Great opportunities are opening up in Africa—as great in scale in many ways as those that exist in the former Soviet Union.

However, Africa cannot do it alone. Many African Governments feel a sense of betrayal that, having implemented the painful reforms advocated by rich countries, they are not being supported. Britain must play a much fuller part in tackling the African crisis and building on the potential offered by reform. We must provide emergency relief. We are watching the Government closely to see whether their high-minded talk of support for the United Nations manifests itself in a major response to the United Nations Secretary-General's appeal for the Horn of Africa.

We must support also the process of recovery. We are shocked by the Government's refusal to support the second phase of the UN's special programme for Africa. Despite the widely acknowledged success of the first phase in channelling support to small farmers to help them recover from famine, in the urgent task of growing more food, and improve the incomes of the rural poor—and the programme's good work and accumulated experience—the Government are prepared to see it die. They seem prepared to allow the support of other donors to go to waste by not making a United Kingdom contribution.

A Labour Government will not be content to allow that to continue happening to that important and crucial fund. We believe that Britain should join other donors who have said that they are prepared to contribute their share to ensure the special programme's continuation, provided that others do the same.

Britain must respond to the mood of reform and extend support for long-term economic development in the region. I refer to the specific role of the African development fund. We support the distinctive and positive contribution made by the African Development bank, and that of the fund in particular under the bank's energetic presidency. We welcome the importance attached to agriculture, which is the top priority for economic development in Africa, and the promise made at the last replenishment to devote more resources to poverty-reduction programmes and those that benefit women.

The bank does not have a faultless record. There are concerns over whether it is keeping its environmental pledges, and we urge it to reconsider whether it is the appropriate instrument for structural adjustment lending. However, the fund's overall contribution has been increasingly positive, and it deserves more support than Britain has given.

In the past, scepticism was expressed about the role of the African Development bank by comparison with other regional development banks—but that has, rightly, faded. One of the most important reasons for supporting the bank is its role as a distinctly Africa-based body.

One of Africa's key needs is to build up its own development institutions, and the African Development bank has made significant advances in that regard in recent years. Those advances are especially important given the eagerly awaited movement to a fully democratic South Africa which, we hope, will take place in the near future. If South Africa played an active role in the ADB—as we hope that it will—it would do a good deal, in the next decade, to help South Africa's reintegration with other African economies, and also to help it play a positive role in the development of the rest of southern Africa and that of the continent as a whole.

Despite the movement by African Governments towards reform, British support of Africa—including its funding of the African development fund—has, in our view, been niggardly. Notwithstanding Britain's extensive links with Africa, its support for the continent is quite a long way behind that of our international partners. Perhaps the Minister will confirm what my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) was told recently by the Minister for Overseas Development; we are sorry to hear that the right hon. Lady is unwell, and hope that she will soon return to the House. According to the right hon. Lady, United Kingdom funding for Africa is half that of our G7 partners Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States, and less than a fifth of that provided by France.

The current, sixth replenishment of the fund represents only a 17 per cent. increase over the previous 50 per cent. replenishment. That is barely enough to keep pace with inflation. Within that meagre replenishment, Britain's contribution has been very poor. According to the most recent statement of total subscriptions available from the ADB, Britain's contribution is less than that of any other G7 country. It is even less than Sweden's contribution, and equal to that of Norway. Britain simply is not pulling its weight.

Although I welcome the fact that the United Kingdom is contributing to the fund, this is a very small slice of a modestly sized cake. It does not do justice to the major economic and political changes that are now being undertaken by African Governments. Must we be confronted yet again with images of mass starvation before Britain makes more effort to act now on long-term investments to prevent the famines of the future? What we need now is action to improve north-south terms of trade, reduce debts, and increase aid—I stress that point, and I do not think that the Minister will be able to defend the Government's position and protect the world's environments.

Let me say a word about the Caribbean Development bank. Although the poverty and economic decline in the Caribbean are not of the same magnitude as those in Africa, there are many parallels between the two regions, in regard to both problems and opportunities. Debt problems in the Caribbean remain considerable, and—as in Africa—relate primarily to official debt, including debts to multilateral institutions. The decline in trade has affected a number of Caribbean commodities, such as bauxite, although possibly less severely than in Africa. At recent meetings with representatives of sister Caribbean parties, I, as a representative of the British Labour party, was able to hear at first hand both about the economic pressures and about the development of democratic institutions in the regions.

Will the Minister tell us the extent of our support for three areas of major importance to the Caribbean? First, what support does the bank give to the development of interregional trade? I am glad to see that that subject is back on the Caribbean agenda. Secondly, how is the bank seeking to foster diversification programmes to help countries reduce their over-reliance on a single crop commodity? Thirdly, what programmes is it supporting to bring about food security in Caribbean nations that remain heavily reliant on the expensive import of basic foods?

Although Africa's emergency needs will continue throughout the current year and the rest of the decade, it should be an increasing priority for the north to support the positive changes that are sweeping the continent. More resources are needed now to aid recovery and development. In countries such as Ethiopia and Angola, which have seen a dramatic end to decades of civil war, support is needed to resettle displaced people, demobilise soldiers, rebuild shattered societies and economies and help safeguard fledgling democracies.

Those aims are as important as assisting the emerging democracies in the former Soviet Union and central and eastern Europe with massive aid and debt relief, if not more important. The equally fundamental changes sweeping Africa have not been rewarded to anything like the same extent—although Africa's needs are so much greater.

7.36 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The orders are not contentious in principle; they are open to criticism only in terms of degree, and of the extent to which the Government are following up their rhetoric with realistic contributions to those in need. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) has just been telling us about that.

In the case of Africa—to which I shall confine my remarks—linking aid with the development of democracy, the pursuance of better-balanced economic policies, the evolution of effective administration, the spread of help to the poor in particular, the encouragement of population control and an emphasis on the environment is desirable. Such a shift of linkage and emphasis has, after all, been under way for some time, and has wide support in other countries and on both sides of the House.

Although I support the thrust of the policy, I must repeat our view that what is being done in Africa—particularly in sub-Saharan Africa—still falls far short of what we should be doing. Not only are the communities

[Sir Russell Johnston]

concerned starting off in a pretty terrible position; they have now been even more gravely affected by the world recession and the Gulf war.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Cynon Valley said about the reduction in the British aid contribution as a proportion of gross national product over the period —getting on for 13 years—since the Conservatives came to office. I hope that positive changes in the functioning and prospects of the United Nations—which we have discussed a good deal today in other connections—will allow a stemming of the flood of arms into the African continent which has caused so much carnage. I appreciate that that does not arise directly from the motion, but it is part of the background, and I hope that the Government will use all their influence to staunch that flood.

Like the hon. Member for Cynon Valley, my party supports the work done by the African development fund, and feels ashamed to compare our contribution with that of other countries of comparable size and economic capacity. I shall not repeat the figures given by the hon. Lady, but it is in no way admirable that we should give one fifth of France's contribution, and one half of Italy's. The orders provide for further United Kingdom contributions towards two funds that enable much valuable work to be undertaken. We should, however, be doing far more.

7.39 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I apologise to the Minister for not being here at the beginning of the debate. Unfortunately, as a new boy, I believed what my superiors told me—that the debate would not start until later. I was in the middle of my bacon and eggs when I saw on the Annunciator that the Minister was speaking. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I left them!

I intend to consider this question from a slightly different angle. For five years I spoke for the British Labour group in the European Parliament on overseas development. For over two years I worked in west Africa, as the Commission's delegate in Guinea-Bissau. I agree entirely with all the ideas that my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) has just put forward, but I shall consider all those matters, too, from a slightly different angle.

There are some practicalities that need to be considered in terms of the cohesion of programmes. That is much more true of Africa than it is of the Caribbean. European Community aid, bilateral aid, United Nations aid and Arab aid, all in the form of projects and programmes, is being given without any attempt being made to ensure that all those projects and programmes complement one another. The European Community's programmes often contradict European development fund programmes in Africa, with the result that they are less effective than they might otherwise be. We need urgently to find a mechanism to unify the programmes and make them more positive.

In theory, the programmes are co-ordinated by the United Nations development programme, but in practice that does not happen. I should be grateful if the Minister could assure us that the Government are working towards creating an alliance in Africa rather than pursuing a policy of rivalry with other countries. That would lead to our programmes being much more cost effective.

In many cases we are destroying the countries that we attempt to assist when providing industrial aid. I think of Tanzania's fishing fleet. The European Community was responsible for financing that fleet of about 40 boats. Almost all them cannot be used, not because the people are terribly at fault but because the fleet was provided with 12 different types of engines and hundreds of different types of screws. Not even this country can boast the technology that would be required to repair and make good all that goes wrong. It is imposssible to gut one ship for the sake of another.

I think in particular of Guinea-Bissau's electrical generating plant. When I first went there it was almost completely out of order. We were lucky to have one hour of electricity a day, and that was mainly in the middle of the night. The problem was mainly due to the many kinds of generator. There was a splendid British generator, but there were also French, German, Russian and Japanese generators, which led to disaster.

Guinea-Bissau has not been independent of Portugal for very long. At the time of independence it had only four graduates and few people had been trained in technology. The people were mainly concerned with rural matters, but they had to cope with sophisticated technology and keep it going. They could not do it. The amount of hard currency that had to be spent on keeping it going could not be sustained. A good feature of the recent writing off of debt is that Guinea-Bissau gained considerable benefit from it.

Guinea-Bissau is moving towards a multi-party system. Assistance is being provided by the United States of America. It is providing money and specialist aid to help Guinea-Bissau to convert to a multi-party system. In the particular circumstances there, I am not altogether convinced that it is wise for Guinea-Bissau to move towards a multi-party system. Parties split along tribal lines; splits are not the result of genuine ideological differences. However, the president has determined that there shall be a multi-party system and he has thrown his full weight behind it. He has ensured that in this case party splits will not start off as tribe versus tribe. A great deal of assistance, from wherever it can be obtained, is required. It would not be expensive. Her Majesty's Government could provide very effective help. I ask the Minister to consider that with great care.

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley said about the difficulties that surround dependence upon a monoculture in the Caribbean. The West Indies is being hit badly by the enormous increase in the production of sugar beet in the United Kingdom. A realistic cane sugar regime is needed. Cane sugar is the life blood of employment and society in the Caribbean. It is a plant which grows well there and it can stand up to all the vagaries of the weather. I beseech the Government to consider that question when looking at trading regimes and the common agricultural policy regimes.

Not least—I am sure that this will be very close to the Minister's heart—I ask him to consider the rum regime. *[Interruption.]* Rum is included in the protocol to the Lomé convention, but it is very difficult to import rum into France. The French protect imports of their own white rum from their overseas territories. It is essential to look towards the next Lomé convention and the provision of a better protocol for rum. I am sure that the Minister agrees that rum is a splendid product. It provides employment for a great many people. If they were able to increase their rum exports, they would also increase the amount of hard currency that they need.

7.47 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): One of the strengths of the House of Commons is its enormous wealth of personal experience. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) has personal experience and also a much rarer quality in the House of Commons—fresh personal experience. All too often our personal experience is far too dated to be useful. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth speaks with fresh personal experience, having held a position of responsibility within the Community. Some of us, for all sorts of reasons, are glad that he has become our colleague in the House of Commons—not least because of his recent personal experience in Africa.

When I was a member of the indirectly elected Parliament I had the good fortune to go to Lomé to attend one of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries functions. I was greatly moved by the proceedings and thought that it was one of the most worthwhile events that the Community had staged. At that time Claude Cheysson —a man of drive and imagination—was the Commissioner with responsibility for these matters. Whatever criticisms may have been made of his performance in other jobs, he was a great Commissioner who succeeded in achieving much.

I apologise to the House for speaking twice in a day, having spoken in the nuclear debate. I was chosen by Mr. Speaker to lead a parliamentary delegation to Zaire in November 1990. I should like to ask the Minister a few questions about that torn and striven country. Zaire has 47 per cent. of the remaining African rain forest. The Minister receives reports from our excellent ambassador, Roger Westbrook. A lot is said about the Foreign Office not doing this or not being interested in that, but Roger Westbrook should receive full credit for having the initiative to see people who were interested in rain forests. In the course of a busy schedule, he had breakfast at Ghillean Prance in Kew and was briefed on rain forest matters in Africa by the director of Kew and his wife, who is a distinguished botanist. I give good to any diplomat who can do that.

In the chaos that is now Zaire, because of the civil war, what sensible measures can we take to protect its flora and fauna and its vast timber resources? My personal reflection during a trip that was truncated by the requirement of the Whips to return early was that Zaire varied enormously from province to province and that some of its provincial governors were men of considerable quality who were trying to do something in places such as East Kasai. Since so much of the African rain forest is in Zaire, what constructive proposals can we make for francophone Africa?

What is the Government's policy on help for francophone Africa? It might be said that because of historical ties we owe our allegiance to Tanzania, Malawi, the Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana and other African countries with which we have particularly close links. That could be an easy way out of doing nothing about francophone Africa. I and my colleagues, the hon. Members for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) and for Wansdyke (Mr. Aspinwall) and my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings), formed the strong impression that people in positions of importance in Kinshasa desperately wanted connections with European countries other than France and Belgium. They understandably wanted links with members of the Community who were not former colonial powers. If resources allow, there is a strong argument for our becoming more involved with francophone Africa and for not taking the line of leaving it to the French.

Last week I was invited to the inaugural meeting of the tropical forest resource group at Kew. I was extremely impressed by David Attenborough's presentation on the importance of water and his study of such sciences as limnology. What is the Government's policy on the acute water situation in much of Africa? When David Attenborough and others talk about the need for a world policy on water, everybody nods his head sagely and says, "Yes, we must have it"; but what is being done? That is a matter that concerns the Edinburgh Centre for Tropical Forests.

In addition, there is the acute problem of the loss of top soil and the use of fire wood as a main fuel. It may sound extraordinary to say it, but there is a strong argument for the Brazilian example of constructing nuclear power stations, which we hope will work one day, to save wood from the Mato Grosso and possibly from the rain forests.

In discussions on the rain forests, Jeff Burley, head of the Oxford forestry institute, pointed out that far too little had been said about saving the dry forest. Is there a policy on helping the dry forest in Africa? The figures given were 58 per cent. dry forest and 42 per cent. rain forest. The dry forest is absolutely enormous and is of considerable importance in stricken areas such as the Sudan, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth knows so well.

A paper was given by Dr. Dransfield on the economic possibilities for rattan. I have previously raised the question of help for rattan growing in Ghana and the Ivory Coast. According to the presentation that was made last week at Kew, there is an enormous potential market for rattan products, and rattan meets every criteria of being sustainable. Can we offer any specific encouragement for rattan? The Minister has expert advisers in the Box who will be able to answer such questions off the top of their heads, and I know that the Whip and his Parliamentary Private Secretary are very athletic in going to the Official Box.

My last question was raised at the Kew seminar by Dr. Colin Ogborne. It concerns optical character recognition and the information that can now be stored on disks to avoid repeating information that could be so valuable in the tropical forest. I know that that subject is dear to the heart of my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and our mutual friend Professor Howell of the Overseas Development Institute. That is my last question to arise out of Kew.

I want to engage the Minister's attention on another subject about which I feel very strongly. This afternoon I asked the Prime Minister a simple, straight, one-sentence question and I was shocked by his reply. I believe that my shock was shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) because he commented on it. The question was whether the Prime Minister would rule out United Nations military action against Libya. His answer came as quick as a flash—a decisive "No, Sir".

This is not the place to repeat my Adjournment debate of the other night about Lockerbie, but I wish to make one

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

comment. Lockerbie was a tragedy of horrendous proportions. The police in my area had to help to clear it up and I went to see it. I do not in any way underestimate the tragedy, but the view of the Scottish police about Syria and Iran is wholly different from what the Foreign Secretary is saying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I find it very difficult to relate what the hon. Gentleman is now saying to either of the orders before the House.

Mr. Dalyell: Yes, that is why I had to make that comment before I return completely to order and return to African development and the great man-made river project in Libya.

That project has been ridiculed as a Colonel Gaddafi white elephant but that is not the view of many ecologists who have been to see it. Nor is it the view of, for example, my friend Professor Barri Jones, who is professor of archaeology at Manchester and responsible for the Cyrenaica digs. He is a very intelligent man who understands how the ancients got their water when that part of north Africa was one of the most fertile parts of the world.

I believe that I have the Minister's sympathy to a certain extent because he, almost uniquely in the House, is an Arabic speaker. Both my parents were Arabic speakers but, I, alas, am not and I regret it very much. We are talking about an area of great civilisation. If you ever get the chance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, do not fail to go to the great Roman remains at Leptis Magnus because they are more spectacular than anything in ancient Rome. That place must have sustained an enormous, sophisticated civilisation; but do not let me digress.

The main point for us is that the man-made river project is the largest engineering project in the western world. Thirty-six United Kingdom firms are involved. The consulting engineers are Brown and Root. In the light of the answer that the Prime Minister gave this afternoon, it is high time that the Government talked seriously to, for example, Dick Morris. He is the chairman not only of Brown and Root but of Nirex. The Government should ask him, as a major business person in this country, what is his view of the Libyan Government. I suspect that it is favourable, as was that of expatriates who could quietly say that those people are not corrupt and that they are pretty efficient.

I do not hide the fact that in the early 1980s Colonel Gaddafi and those around him may have been responsible for some terrible things in the support of terrorism. However, there is much more to be brought into that equation—for example, the bombing of Benghazi and Tripoli. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley, I believe in seeing for myself. She has moved the House by going to areas that interest her in particular in Iraq, and she and others can take it from me that I was greatly moved by going to see working-class areas in Tripoli and Benghazi which had been flattened by bombing that had caused terrible casualties. That had been done by bombers based in the United Kingdom and, whatever the rights and wrongs of La Belle discotheque which was purported to be the reason for the bombing, I cannot believe that the working-class people in Benghazi and Tripoli had much responsibility for what happened in Berlin.

The Libyan situation should be considered carefully by the Foreign Office because the Libyans have held out an olive branch. My Labour colleagues and I went there in early November. It may be said that we were naive to go, but, if so, we were naive in the company of that cautious fox Mr. Giulio Andreotti, the Italian Prime Minister, and Mr. Dumas, the French Foreign Minister. They had both been and there are few more cautious than they.

We should reconsider the Libyan situation, remembering that there are 5,500 of our fellow countrymen there, many of whom are Scottish engineers from the west of Scotland. When I wrote an article defending my general views in the *Sunday Post*, I received a great deal of mail from relations who said that they were extremely concerned about what might happen. The British were well treated the last time, but if it were to happen again—and I return to my question this afternoon—and if military action were not ruled out—I am not so sure that, human beings being what they are, British workers who are earning the Minister's bread and butter, my bread and butter and that of all of us by working in the oil industry and related engineering projects, will be so well treated.

The Libyans are per head easily the richest in Africa because of their huge oil production. They have an enormous potential which they say they are prepared to deploy—and I am inclined to believe them—to help the less wealthy or, indeed, the poorest, countries in Africa —especially those in the Maghreb—to make progress. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth is doing me the courtesy of listening attentively. I suspect that he knows from his European experience that that is certainly considered to be a possibility by his former Italian colleagues. Incidentally, if anyone is talking about sanctions, I can tell him that that is pie in the sky. I do not believe for one moment that the Italian Government will impose sanctions on Libya in view of their interests in Libya and their dependence on Libyan oil. The planes will fly every day as they do from Fiumicino and if they are banned from flying from Fiumicino for a week, they will fly from Bari or Taranto or some obscure airfield. The Italians will not go along with sanctions against Libya—that is sheer make-believe.

Before anyone says that I am callous, I can say that I am extremely close to the Lockerbie relatives. Jim Swire and his wife Jane were my guests here—as they have been previously—the week before last and the week before that. Anybody who has been to Lockerbie and who has a close relationship with the Roman Catholic priest Father Patrick Keegans who lives in Sherwood crescent, which was destroyed, or with the Rev. Logan Kirk, who speaks for the Church of Scotland community in the area, cannot be callous about the matter.

It is high time that the Foreign Office looked again at the whole question of economic and political relations with Libya. The Foreign Office should look at the report of the Adjournment debate. Although I had the courtesy to give to the Foreign Office at 9.15 am that Monday, every word of what I planned to say and although the debate did not take place before 1 am on Tuesday, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), the Minister of State, did not make the least attempt to answer the precise questions of which——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I have been very tolerant with the hon. Gentleman, but he is now straying well away from the orders again.

Mr. Dalyell: You have been extremely tolerant, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have made my point and I will leave it at that.

8.10 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I will be brief because the orders are not controversial and we do not oppose them. However, this is an occasion when it is possible to say to the Government that we have heard so much of this before. Some of us can remember back to the 1950s and to the time of the Colombo plan, when various grandiose schemes were suggested and when we were told that the problems of Africa and of third-world countries could be dealt with if only the plans were put into operation. It is now almost 40 years on, yet the world is still divided between the countries that have and the countries that have not.

It is appalling that the Government place such small importance on overseas development. That must be so because only 0·27 per cent. of gross domestic product is expended on overseas aid. The Government must tell us why that is the case. It is no good arguing that it is a matter of waiting for economic growth in the United Kingdom before we can help the rest of the world. The figure of 0·27 is the percentage of GDP at any particular time. In the past 13 years, we have been brought up on the fairy tale of Britain's economic miracle. We are repeatedly told by Ministers that economic growth has been greater and that economic performance has been better in this country than in Germany, in Italy, in France and in the countries of our other European Community partners.

We need to examine exactly what the Government mean by economic growth. They do not mean manufacturing investment. Many of the countries that have made their way and have taken their place in the second rather than in the third world are the countries that have found that investment from multinational corporations has enabled them to do so. I refer to countries such as South Korea and Taiwan which, not many years ago, were regarded very much as third-world countries. African countries, such as Mali, Chad and Guinea-Bissau, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) knows so well—and I am delighted to see him here—do not yet have the resources to enable them to step out of the third into the second world.

The Government are under the misapprehension that overseas development is not important electorally. They will be amazed when the next election comes. In previous election campaigns in which I have taken part, it is highly significant, especially when one addresses meetings promoted by the churches and by charitable organisations, that overseas aid is very much to the fore. Even in my poor constituency—poor not in the hearts of the people, but in the poverty that has been pressed on them by the Government's economic policies—people who are unemployed come to my surgery and write letters to me at the House expressing the view that Britain should do more about poverty in areas such as the Horn of Africa and Ethiopia. When the Ethiopian famine was shown on television, I was inundated by letters asking what the British Government were doing.

The Government may be able to say that they are giving assistance. However, the Minister's speech posed more questions than it answered. Will the Minister spell out to the House and to the nation what percentage of the African development fund is contributed by our European Community partners? The Minister boasted that our share in the African development fund—I do not know whether the replenishment element or the total amount—has increased from 3·55 per cent. to 4 per cent. What is the contribution of France, of Portugal and of Italy? Where do we stand in the league table of assistance to the African development fund? I should love to know the answer and I am sure that many people will ask that question in the next few months as we approach the general election.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I will give the answer.

Mr. Wareing: It is unusual for my hon. Friend to make a suggestion from a sedentary position because he is more often on his feet. I think that he will provide the answer. I want the Minister not only to provide the answer, but to give the justification for our share being so drastically small when we have had the marvellous economic miracle of the disastrous Thatcherite years. The Minister tells us that the United Kingdom provides 17 per cent. of the Caribbean Development fund. What share is being taken up by others? Britain especially has a moral responsibility to the Caribbean because most of the Caribbean was part of the former British empire and most of it remains within the Commonwealth. If it were the case that Germany, France, Italy or Portugal were contributing a similar share or a bigger share, that would be a damnable testimony to the inadequacy of the Government's economic development policy for the third world and for the Caribbean.

I also want to know the answer to the question posed by the Minister when he talked about the principles on which aid will be based. He talked about sound policy frameworks and about economic reforms. What does he mean? Does he mean getting on one's bended knee and bowing in the direction of the Thatcher Foundation, for example? Is the answer something far more meaningful than that?

Market economics have not solved the problems even of our economy and they certainly cannot solve the problems of the African economies. We cannot control environmental pollution in the United Kingdom simply by looking to the market, and we cannot save the rain forests of Africa or of Brazil by sheer market economics. Something more is required—the middle way which requires the planning of resources to ensure that the problems are tackled.

The Minister referred to "good government", but what does he mean by that? Is "good government" the one party state, such as Malawi? Hastings Banda has always been a favourite of Tory politicians. Is he "good government"? Is the Government of Kenya, with all its recent problems from which the British Government have veered away, good government? I suggest that before there can be good government there must be self-government. I believe that it was the Liberal statesman, Campbell-Bannerman, who said that self-government is better than good government. I have always believed that to be the case because I believe that, although it may not be perfect, democracy is the best form of government even though it sometimes throws up the type of Government that our people have had to endure for the past 13 years.

[Mr. Wareing]

However, should we not argue that if there is to be good government and if people in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and Zaire are to have rights and democracy, the first thing to do is to put food into people's mouths and ensure that they have a roof over their head? It is no use talking like that to this Government because one does not need to go more than a couple of hundred yards from this place to find people in our own country who do not have a roof over their heads. It is only when people have food in their bellies, shelter over their heads and something reasonable with which to clothe their bodies that they can be preached at and called upon to look at forms of government that give them rights and ensure that dictators do not have full reign over third-world countries.

Good government is all very well and I love to think that, in time, plural democracy will come to all the countries in Africa, but first things first. The first thing is to put food into the bellies of starving African people and to ensure that they have a good environment in which to live. If we do that, it will not be for the benefit of the inhabitants of those countries alone, because if we improve the environment of continents such as Africa and areas such as the Caribbean, we are providing ourselves with a greater safeguard than that which can be achieved by the massive sale of arms to such countries, which the Government have condoned. We would provide ourselves with a safeguard for maintaining world peace and, in the long run, would provide markets and business for people in our own continent and our own country which would ensure their employment as well as a better and decent standard of living for the people of Africa.

8.22 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I had not planned to speak in this debate, Mr. Speaker, because of my illness and hospitalisation, of which you are aware. However, having heard the debate, I am minded to say a few words.

The House is indebted to my hon. Friends the Members for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth has given the House the benefit of his great expertise in such matters and has referred to an important consideration. I refer to the way in which we can unify the contributions of the major donors especially at the technological level. I have been struck by reports that I have received from various organisations in parts of Africa that, on occasions, aid has been allocated for projects that have previously been put in place by other donors and that when our tranche has been allocated we have not taken into account the previous failure of similar projects. That position seems to arise because of the lack of co-ordination between the major donors.

I am indebted also to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow for referring to the conference that he attended a week ago at Kew at which Sir David Attenborough spoke and at which the concept of a world policy on water was advocated. I found that particularly interesting because when my hon. Friend and I visited India some weeks ago we were struck by the fact that when seeking to secure development in those parts of India that are in need of development—almost the entire country—a major target is the need to provide villages and communities with a water supply. Wherever we went, the lack of a water supply was clearly what determined the level and nature of economic activity in the area. As my hon. Friend said, we need a world policy on water. That matter will need to be addressed by the next Labour Government.

The danger in these debates is that, whenever Ministers stand at the Dispatch Box, they lead us and the country to believe that they are making resources available to the various and varied programmes that are submitted to them for support. The public could well believe that the Government are actually increasing aid, when the reverse is happening. Last week my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow tabled a significant question that drew from Ministers information and evidence to the effect that the three principal United Nations agencies with which we are concerned have suffered cuts not of 38 per cent., as was suggested today in the Prime Minister's statement, but of an average of nearly 60 per cent. Those are substantial cuts in United Nations programmes to which the Government have admitted in an answer to my hon. Friend——

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister shakes his head, but before replying to the debate he would do well to secure a copy of the answer that was given to my hon. Friend last week.

Several references have been made to our contribution to the African development fund. It would be for the benefit of the House if I were to place our contribution in the context of those made by other countries since the fund was started in, I believe, 1972. During that period, France's contribution has been twice ours; Germany's contribution has been two and a half times ours; the United States' contribution has been three and half times ours; the Japanese contribution has been four times ours; and the contribution of Sweden—a very small country—has been substantially more than ours. Furthermore, Switzerland—that small country in the centre of Europe—has made a larger contribution and my much-loved Italy has contributed twice the amount of the United Kingdom. But we are talking about a part of the world with which Britain in particular has immense historic links. Indeed, although previous Labour Governments made Africa a priority when determining areas of need, this Government seem to see Africa differently.

I understand that the sixth replenishment will come into effect only when 40 per cent. of the contributions have been deposited. Perhaps the Minister will explain whether there will be any delay in the allocation. If I am short of breath, Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you will understand in the light of what I said earlier, so please forgive me. I hope that the Minister will explain whether any delay in the contributions of others could influence the use of the moneys that we are allocating to Africa.

In one regard, the Prime Minister's statement today was particularly significant and I do not want to criticise that part because it was a notable contribution to an important issue affecting third-world countries. The Prime Minister said:

> "We asked the Secretary-General to make recommendations for a more effective role for the United Nations as peacekeeper and as peacemaker. Under article 99 of the charter, the Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which, in his opinion, may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

> We hope the new Secretary-General will use those powers. He will report to us within six months with his recommendations."

I am pleased that such matters of substance are discussed at the United Nations and that there will be a report on them. What worries me is that article 27 of the UN charter almost prohibits intervention in the internal affairs of nation states. There is a crying need for intervention of a particular type in various parts of the world—not the intervention to which my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow referred with some concern in the case of Libya, but intervention where it is impossible to deliver aid and meet the needs of suffering peoples.

In that respect I refer to what is happening in the Horn of Africa, not so much in Ethiopia as in the Sudan. According to Oxfam, the effects of conflict and drought on already weakened economies in the Horn have pushed the margins of effective groups beyond the bounds of near vulnerability to a state of critical impoverishment. Coupled with massive population movements and famine, the disruption to already inadequate social services and, in some cases, the loss of traditional coping machanisms have created unprecedented levels of hardship and household stress in the region. In many parts of the Horn family farms have been abandoned and assets destroyed or stolen. Children have been deserted and orphaned, and, in many cases, drawn into the fighting. Women have been exposed increasingly to violence and rape. Diseases, such as malaria, have swept through the region, adding to the already high death toll. Fighting between rival clans and factions within clans has escalated in Somalia, engulfing some cities and communities in violence and bloodshed. Conflict has increased in the Sudan, in parts of Ethiopia and Djibouti. Ethnic tensions are complicating attempts at reforming administrative and political processes. Those are the comments of Oxfam's field officers who are witnessing what is happening and reporting back to the developed world.

I do not know whether it is right to say this, but I feel strongly that the UN must find a way of intervening in these areas. We cannot allow hundreds of thousands of lives, indeed sometimes millions of lives, to be prejudiced and endangered because the western developed world, the Security Council or possibly distorted liberal opinion in the west is unwilling to realise that we have a duty to intervene and ensure that aid reaches those people who, otherwise, will lose their life.

In recent years, many of the problems in the Horn could have been dealt with if the western democracies and the Security Council had recognised their responsibility to take action—not to intervene militarily, as the Prime Minister may have implied in his statement, but to intervene with a spirit of compassion, understanding and concern to deal with the problems of these desperate people who live in desperate conditions.

Finally, I come to the Caribbean Development bank. It raises yet another issue which has caused me increasing concern over the past year—the monitoring of funds from our aid budget for developing countries. Perhaps it is my 11 years on the Public Accounts Committee that have made me a fierce defender of the taxpayers' interest, but they want to know that aid gets through to people, meets needs and secures the objective of policy to which all Governments subscribe—to ensure that we help people in need.

The aims and objectives of the bank were clearly set down by Mr. Ben Whitaker in a debate in January 1970 just before the fall of the Labour Government. At that time we were contributing 50 per cent. of the paid-up capital of the bank. That is far more as a proportion than the sum that we are paying today. It seems that others have taken over our role. Indeed, the replenishment in this order is only twice as much in cash terms, not real terms, as we were allocating at the time of the construction of the bank in 1970. I do not think that I have misread Mr. Whitaker's comments.

Be that as it may, we allocate moneys with a view to their being used as concessional funds for investment. Although the Minister says that we have representatives, what monitoring ensures that we absolutely meet the objectives set by Parliament? Is there a possibility that funds will make their way into projects that the British taxpayer may not feel deserve support under the heading of needy relief? Is it possible that without proper monitoring funds can be invested in areas that, in our view, may not be helpful in securing our objectives? We are here to ensure that moneys are made available for the development of these countries and that through that development we meet the needs of people who should be the real beneficiaries.

Mr. Dalyell: Does my hon. Friend agree that one example of that is what appears to have happened with the sale of vast areas of the Guyana rain forest and the resale of perhaps the most fragile area of the whole South American river system area?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: My hon. Friend has just triggered my memory. He is absolutely right. I had forgotten that example. Indeed, it is only a few weeks since I tabled a question on that. At that time the Clerks in the Table Office referred me to answers that my hon. Friend had gleaned from Ministers. If I recall correctly, a banker or a British company——

Mr. Dalyell: It was Lord Beaverbrook who had been a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry and who is, I think, the treasurer of the Conservative party.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: —purchased at a low price a project that was supported in the 1970s with substantial sums of taxpayers' money.

I recall another example. A few weeks ago *The Guardian* revealed an investment in the Virgin Islands. Ministers may feel that what happened can be justified in that some may say that the investment was made to avoid social dislocation or trouble in that particular community. Nevertheless, some question whether that investment should have been made in so far as losses on a particular operation were being written off. These are important matters.

The only way to resolve these problems is for our discussion of projects to include not just comment on their technicality, but examples. Tonight the Minister has not given us lists of projects to discuss. In future Ministers may think it wise to make it clear on the explanatory memorandums provided with such orders where the money has been spent. Taxpayers want to know that, because they want to know that those in development funds and banks take into consideration value for money when investing these moneys. All I can say to Ministers is

[Mr. Campbell-Savours]

that, in future, it would be good if some projects could be identified in whatever material is provided for hon. Members in advance of our debates.

8.39 pm

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I should like to reply to as many of the issues raised by hon. Members as possible. This has been a courteous and harmonious debate, but, none the less, I appreciate that it sparks an area of controversy in the House about the overall level of funding by the United Kingdom. I shall comment on that in due course, but first I should like to consider the detailed points raised by hon. Members.

As a result of collective brains—to use the phrase of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—I have a sheaf of notes on which I shall rely and call upon in my speech. My comments may therefore be somewhat incoherent and not as elegant as I would like, since I have not had time to put all those notes into order. However, I believe that my reply will be fairly comprehensive.

First, may I say how pleased I was to see the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) address the House? I hope that there will be occasions on one of the railway journeys that we often share northwards when I shall be able to talk to him further. I mean no disrespect to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) by commenting on the hon. Gentleman's speech first; I shall return to her opening speech later.

The hon. Member for Workington referred to the form of influence that we have over the policies of the Caribbean Development bank and the African Development bank. It is right to consider the institutional set-up that enables us to monitor those two institutions. The African Development bank has 18 seats on its board—two thirds for regional members and one third for non-regional members, of which we are one. The board meets monthly. There are so many non-regional members that we share that one seat with three other countries—Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal. We try to reach a consensus on the way in which we vote. Inevitably, that practice dilutes to a considerable extent the degree of supervision—not influence—that any one country, including ourselves, can give. However, we have great influence because we are respected by our colleagues.

The United Kingdom, along with Canada, is a major shareholder in the Caribbean Development bank. We have a separate seat on the board of directors, and our executive member is the locally based official in the region who is responsible for our bilateral aid. We have a major influence on the board.

The hon. Member for Workington asked whether we can be sure that the British taxpayer would be happy with every investment that is made. I greatly respect the hon. Gentleman's interest in ensuring, on behalf of the taxpayer and the Treasury, that that money from the taxpayer is well spent, but, obviously, the short answer to his question is no: one cannot be certain that the taxpayer would be absolutely happy with every investment. There are occasions when, given the consensus of the four different countries under which we operate, we are sometimes not entirely happy and we may express our reservations.

That loss of sovereignty and control over aid disbursement is not serious, however, because we have great influence. Such loss of sovereignty and control is inevitable if one gives sums of money to such an institution to disburse. If we did not want that loss sovereignty, we would not give a penny to the African development fund —we would give it all through our bilateral subscriptions and dues. We could do it that way, but we choose to do it through the African Development bank.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The question is whether they meet tests of development soundness—soft loan allocations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There is a test for soft loan standards, because a country's eligibility depends on its relative poverty, as defined by its gross national product per head and its creditworthiness. With the African Development bank, countries with a GNP of more than $900 per head are not entitled to receive concessional resources, and 90 per cent. of the fund's resources are earmarked for countries with a GNP per head of $510 or less. Those are the sort of criteria that are set. We monitor them, of course, and we are satisfied that those criteria are followed.

The nature of the projects is less important than a country's eligibility but, in general, we focus on activities concerning agriculture, social services and the environment. In Benin and Zambia, the structural adjustment programmes have been the method of support used.

The hon. Member for Workington asked a specific question about when the 40 per cent. trigger—the current allocation—for the African development fund will be reached. As at 22 January, 12 donors had deposited instruments of contribution totalling 1 billion fund units of account or 39·1 per cent. of capital. I need not name those donors. Kuwait, alongside the United Kingdom, is also actively considering its position now. I am confident that, within the next week or so, the 40 per cent. trigger limit will be reached. It is a race between Kuwait and the United Kingdom to reach the end of the course.

I do not want to spend too much time on the speech of the hon. Member of Workington, but he did mention the world policy on water and the Kew conference. I agree that the problem of water resources, especially those shared between countries, will become increasingly important in the future. Water supply and sanitation projects are also vital, and this is certainly an area in which the African development fund is assisting. In 1990, more than £10·5 million was spent on water and sanitation projects under the ODA's bilateral programmes in Africa.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that Canada and the United Kingdom were founder members of the Caribbean development fund. Since then, France, Germany and Italy have joined. The inevitable result is that not only the British share, but the Canadian share has, in relative terms —relative to the total raised, because the fund has got much bigger—declined.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley spoke about Africa, and my comments will refer to her speech, but I appreciate that those comments will also relate to the contributions from the hon. Members for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) and for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). In terms of humanitarian assistance, we have made a swift, generous and continuous response to the present food crisis in Africa. Since September 1990, we have spent about £135 million and £255 million since the beginning of 1989. The United Kingdom is among the largest bilateral food aid donors to the Horn. We are deeply concerned at the desperate situation in Mogadishu. We have given nearly £2·3 million of emergency aid in recent weeks, but violence is badly disrupting our relief efforts. As the hon. Lady will know, Security Council resolution 733 calls for a ceasefire and for access to relief supplies.

I realise that my remarks are somewhat disjointed but I shall come later to some of the more substantial comments made by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley. She mentioned population activities and overseas aid. In 1990, almost £24 million were spent on activities directly related to population concerns—a 28 per cent. increase in real terms since 1989. A further £67 million was spent on other health programmes, many of which contributed indirectly to reducing population growth.

Perhaps the gravamen of the hon. Lady's speech was our contribution to the African development fund No. 6. As I said in my opening speech, that represents a modest increase in real terms over the fifth replenishment. She said that the United Kingdom's role was far too small in that development fund, but she must appreciate that, if we are to make a fair analysis of the British aid programme, it must be stated that the African development fund is only one of many channels of bilateral aid.

The hon. Member for Workington implied that we have less control over aid disbursement in that fund than over bilateral aid. But many other avenues of aid, including the World bank and the European development fund, provide aid to Africa. It cannot be disputed that Africa is high on the United Kingdom's list of priorities for aid. Indeed, almost half our bilateral aid goes to Africa. Our contribution to the special programme for Africa makes us the fourth largest bilateral donor to that programme of action.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley also referred to the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and I am fully aware of the issue. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, in a letter that the hon. Member for Cynon Valley will have received, explained the Government's position. It must be remembered that we were unhappy about the first phase of the special programme for Africa under IFAD. We made it clear that we were contributing to that first phase rather reluctantly. Indeed, our £7 million pledge at that time was expressed as a one-off exercise, so there is no question of our behaving inconsistently with policy established over a number of years.

The IFAD's future activities in Africa should be financed in the same way as its work elsewhere, and the most important priority is not the special programme for Africa but to work for a successful outcome of the fourth replenishment, which we are about to undertake this year, and generous provision of IFAD's resources. Discussions are due to start in Qatar in April.

Mrs. Clwyd: I did not mention IFAD, but I shall return to it later. I mentioned the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and the United Nations children's fund. Those three funds have experienced considerable cuts in the past 12 years under the Government, and they are particularly important to Africa and the Caribbean.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I was about to come to that. I am sorry if I attributed those remarks to the hon. Lady rather than to the hon. Member for Hemsworth.

Mr. Enright: Those were not my remarks.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In any event, those points were raised.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley also mentioned our aid to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. She knows that that aid is separate from and in addition to our aid to developing countries. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reaffirmed that during the meeting with Commonwealth heads of Government in Harare last autumn. Africa has been and remains an enormously high priority for the British aid programme.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley mentioned the reduction in our voluntary contributions to the United Nations agencies from 1979 to 1990. The hon. Member for Workington said that I should check the figures. I know the figures perfectly well, and they are not those that he gave. He may have given the nominal figure, but the 37 per cent. reduction is in real terms, and that is the basis on which I have been working.

Our multilateral aid commitments have been rising steadily over the years, and the demands on them are growing month by month—especially our commitment to the European Community aid programmes, which are an area of maximum growth. I am sure that no Labour Members, who have such a deep and abiding support for the ideals and principles of the European Community, would wish to see a reduction in that commitment. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley should speak to her Front-Bench colleagues, because their rhetoric is very much in sympathy with that view. *[Interruption.]* I shall not stray too far into the European Community debate tonight.

The consequence has been that, from 1979, to use the same time scale as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley in framing her question to my right hon. Friend, the expenditure has risen from £118 million to £333 million in 1990, an increase in cash terms—to use the figures of the hon. Member for Workington—of 182 per cent., or well over 25 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister confirm that, according to the Minister for Overseas Development and OECD figures, we spent the lowest proportion of gross domestic product last year in the history of the United Kingdom? How can the Minister plead his case when, in answer to my question, Ministers stand at the Dispatch Box and admit that fact?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall come to that, and I shall stick to my word, but I cannot concede that point.

The consequence of that growth in European Community multilateral aid is that we have had little option but to restrain our contribution to those voluntary United Nations programmes.

The hon. Lady asked three specific questions at the end of her speech. She asked about the Caribbean Development bank's support for intra-regional trade, economic diversification and food security. The Caribbean Development bank aims to support all three policies throughout the region. It works closely with other regional institutions of importance of which the hon. Lady will be aware, such as CARICOM—the Caribbean Community

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

and Common Market—and the Organisation of East Caribbean States in developing programmes in those regions.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) spoke of the United Nations target for developed countries to contribute 0·7 per cent in aid, and of the United Kingdom's contribution to the African development fund. I think that I have addressed the issue of the development fund, and I shall deal with the United Nations target later.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth is an acknowledged expert on the subject, but I cannot accept his assertion that there is no co-ordination among donor nations. Under Lomé 4, the European development fund has been authorised to lend money for structural adjustment programmes and it is co-ordinating its activities with the World bank. It is not part of the World bank special programme of assistance, but it co-ordinates structural adjustment efforts with that institution.

Another example of donor co-ordination is the World bank's special programme of assistance for Africa—an excellent illustration of the mechanism for co-ordinating donor assistance to Africa. Our pledge of £300 million to SPA 2 is evidence of the high regard in which we hold that institution's achievements. It is now examining its public expenditure priorities, which should further enhance the effectiveness with which aid is used in Africa.

Mr. Enright: I was not talking about the World bank, but as the Minister has raised that issue, may I say that co-ordination with the World bank on the ground, as tested, is not good. I should be appalled were the World bank to become the driving force of co-ordination for the European development fund, as the aims of those two organisations are not allied. I do not wish to make allegations against Her Majesty's Government, the Netherlands Government or anywhere else, but it truly worries me that bilateral projects are often put in place which do not always prove helpful or complementary, and consideration is not always given to previous failures. I know that the will and desire exist for co-ordination, but often it is not forthcoming as it is not given sufficient attention, and rivalries and jealousies remain.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am sure that the experts could fairly debate that point, but tonight is not the appropriate occasion to do so. The hon. Gentleman advanced the case for multilateral aid programmes as opposed to bilateral ones. I can see the force of that argument on the face of it.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned rum. The European Community is concerned to ensure that rum should be treated in the same way as other agricultural products. We want to ensure fair competition and prevent artificial barriers. Therefore, we are resisting the French position.

With regard to sugar, we wish to ensure that small producers without much scope to diversify are not excluded from trading with the European Community, and are not unfairly treated. I have personal knowledge of that subject because, as Minister, I have responsibility for our relations with the Caribbean region. I agree with much of what was said on that issue.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What about bananas?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: That subject was not raised.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow referred to Zaire. United Kingdom bilateral aid is naturally focused on the Commonwealth in Africa, but Zaire is a major recipient of the African Development bank finance and fund resources. We hope that the African development fund will undertake work in the forestry sector in Zaire. We agree that tropical rain forest resources are of vital importance in Zaire.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow also mentioned the issue of dry versus wet forests. We most certainly agree that dry forests deserve as much attention as tropical and moist forests.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow referred to rattan and to water in Africa. My collective brain has its limitations, and it cannot answer this question off the top of its collective head. Once again, the hon. Gentleman has shown by his skill and knowledge a way of challenging the expertise of the experts, who will have to take further instruction on the matter. I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman is answered by letter.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow kindly referred me to Leptis Magna and the successful irrigation system of the Roman world. If I may digress for a moment, I refer him in turn to the successful water system invented by the Greeks at Pergamon. That system did not even need the Roman aqueduct; it managed the flow of water on Archimedean principles, which was even more remarkable. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's friend in Manchester university will enlighten him further about that.

In 1990, we spent more than £10·5 million bilaterally on water sanitation projects in Africa——

Mr. Dalyell: On the question of Libya—I realise, an unpopular cause and a delicate issue—may I ask the Foreign Office to reflect again on what I have said, which is rather different from the subject of the Adjournment debate? I say this in the presence of the Leader of the House: if, heaven help us, there are to be sanctions or if military action is to take place, there should at least be some statement to the House of Commons and a three-hour debate before we go further down that perilous road.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman will understand that, in all matters of such sensitivity, it is deeply important that a weak signal is never given by any Member of this House. He will agree that it will be only wise of me not to attempt to comment on or in any way to qualify the words that the Prime Minister used this afternoon—and I have no intention of doing so.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) asked me to list the contributions of our European Community partners. That is all published information. I can give it again tonight if the hon. Gentleman wants the figures, but I suspect that the fact he wants to establish, which I do not dispute, is that Britain comes fourth on the list of contributors behind France, with 9·43 per cent., Italy with 9·43 per cent., and Germany with 9 per cent. Britain gives 4 per cent. I will not list the countries that come below us.

Why is the United Kingdom so low down the list? I explained during my comments on the speech by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley that we attach high priority to Africa, but that there are other channels in the aid system. Fifty per cent. of our aid budget goes to the African continent. Our aid to Kenya has been well used in helping to improve living standards and prospects for the poorest. Kenya's economic performance has been better than many other sub-Saharan country. We welcome the positive moves of recent weeks on economic and political reform, but further effort is needed on key economic issues. The coming elections must be free and fair. We shall continue to stress the need for transparency and a level playing field. The Kenyans are absolutely clear about our views on that.

I hope that I have done justice to at least some part of all hon. Members' contributions. I now want to deal with the central point raised this evening. It has been raised often before with me and with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development and I am sure that it will be raised again. I shall answer it as best I can, although I am afraid that I may burden Opposition Members with an answer that they have heard before. It is important, however, that the facts should be put in some perspective.

We accept in principle the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent., but we are not prepared to set a timetable, because a real-terms growth in aid quality is much more important. When the hon. Lady says that our official aid-to-GNP ratio was 0·2 per cent. in the calendar year of 1990, that does not reflect——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: My hon. Friend did not say that.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I thought she did.

For those who do say that, it does not reflect the underlying growth in the aid programme. This year—1991-92—our aid programme is £1,789 million, which is 10 per cent. more in cash terms and 3 per cent. more in real terms than in 1991-92. Over the past five years, our average aid—to—GNP ratio has been 0·3 per cent. We cannot make forecasts, but in 1991-92 our aid is expected to be about 0·3 per cent. of GNP.

Is the hon. Lady saying that, if a Labour Government were elected, they would immediately put right that ratio? Is she making a promise to the British people that this improvement will be financed by an increase in taxation, or that, just as the Conservative Government have always aspired to improve that target, so will a Labour Government, and the British people will have to wait a long time for such an improvement to materialise? The Government have tried strenuously to maintain effective and sensible aid policies, with a view to maintaining that commitment and reaching that target when the country can afford it.

9.11 pm

Mrs. Clwyd *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has already spoken. She needs the leave of the House to speak again.

Mrs. Clwyd: With the leave of the House, I wish to answer the question that the Minister asked me. The Labour party's policy is clear. I would be happy to send him a copy of our policy document if he would like to have more detail. It is much more substantial than the policies produced by the Government in their papers on overseas development.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Lady does not have the leave of the House to speak a second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When I asked whether the hon. Lady had the leave of the House to speak again, there was no objection.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I said no.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am sorry that the hon. Lady was not here for the debate. She has come into the Chamber in the past five minutes.

The answer to the Minister's question is clear in Labour party policy documents. Within the lifetime of a future Labour Government—that is, within the next five years—we shall aim to meet the 0·7 per cent. United Nations target for developed countries. The Government are not prepared to set out any timetable for reaching that limit. Their aid policies will be judged by that failure to make any such promise. In 1979, the Labour Government achieved an aid budget of 0·51 per cent. of GNP. Since then, the Government have carved that back, and the developing world has lost £10 billion in aid. Those are the facts.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Caribbean Development Bank (Further Payments) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION

Resolved,

That the draft African Development Fund (Sixth Replenishment) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 13th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No 101 (5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION

That the draft Employment Protection (Variation of Limits) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 19th December, be approved—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Quesition put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No 101 (5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

UNFAIR DISMISSAL

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Limits of Basic and Special Awards) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 19th December, be approved—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No 101 (5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

TRANSPORT

That the draft International Transport Conventions Act 1983 (Amendment) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Question agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (SCOTLAND)

Resolved,

That the Rate Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1991, dated 17th December 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

SATELLITE BROADCATING STANDARDS

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7573/91 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 6th November and 11th December 1991 and 10157/91, relating to standards for satellite broadcasting of television signals, and 8122/91, relating to audio-visual production in the context of the strategy for high definition television; and endorses the Government's approach which is to aim for the correct balance between promoting new broadcasting technologies, protecting the rights of satellite broadcasters and serving the best interests of consumers.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

SOCIAL SECURITY (MORTGAGE INTEREST PAYMENTS) BILL

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Ordered,

That, if the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House, further proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed and that as soon as any proceedings on any Resolution come to by the House on Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill [Money] have been concluded, this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 4th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Heseltine relating to Local Government Finance not later than Ten o'clock; and those Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 4th February, the Motions in the name of Mr Francis Maude relating to Supplementary Estimates 1991-92 and Estimates 1992-93 (Vote on Account) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or for one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon, whichever is the later, at which time Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of them.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 5th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Hunt relating to Local Government Finance (Wales) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or the end of a period of one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon, whichever is the later, at which time Mr. Speaker shall put the Question necessary to dispose of them; and those Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

TRAFFIC CALMING BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Traffic Calming Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Police National Computer

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

9.15 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome very much the opportunity to raise on the Adjournment the question of the working of the police national computer mark 2 and the need for effective safeguards, and I am delighted that this debate is starting at a relatively civilised hour.

The police national computer mark 2 came on stream last autumn, and I understand that its direct access capacity is 190 million bytes, with a further 80,000 million bytes available as back-up on disk. Already, about 60 million records are included on it. I welcome very much developments such as this one. This national computer will enable the police force to prevent crime and to be more effective in catching criminals.

I regret that during my research for this debate I found that, in the field of computers, one of the least well-equipped police forces is that in my own area, Greater Manchester. I understand that the Greater Manchester force still does not have the necessary computer capacity to take full advantage of the police national computer mark 2. Cynics in Manchester claim that the last chief constable there had a direct link to God and, therefore, did not see the advantages of computers. Whatever the explanation, it is very sad that the Manchester force does not have the necessary computer capacity. I hope that achieving that capacity will be one of the priorities of the new police committee.

As I have said, I welcome computers. However, like all modern inventions, for all their advantages they must be effectively controlled. That is the point of this debate. The need for control of computers was well anticipated by the Lindop committee in the 1970s. A whole chapter of that committee's report is devoted to the question of the requirements concerning data collection by the police force and the security services and the necessary controls. I am worried about one of the Lindop committee's central recommendations—that, with the recording of any information on computers, fact should be separated from supposition or intelligent guesswork. The Home Office and its Ministers accepted that recommendation in respect of both the mark 1 and the mark 2 computers. I gather, however, that about 1982 the Home Office changed its mind. However, it made no public statement concerning its decision that factual information and suspicions could be mixed in one computer. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us why that change took place.

The Lindop report made it fairly clear that safeguards with regard to access and illegal use are needed. I hope that the Minister will confirm who is entitled to have access to the police national computer. Obviously the police have that right, although I understand that there is some doubt in respect of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. That may be for technical reasons, or a matter of policy.

There is the question also of the extent to which Customs and Excise and the immigration authorities have access. Also, given the meetings of the Trevi group of Ministers and the development of Europol, perhaps the Minister can say how soon it will be possible for other EC police forces to gain access to Britain's police national computer and what restrictions will apply.

One wonders whether the Department of Social Security fraud branch is able to request information, and what checks there are on its legitimate use. I understand that local authorities have pressed hard for access to the criminal records section, in particular in vetting potential employees—particularly those who would be working in sensitive areas, such as the social services. I am informed that local authorities currently have to make their requests through the police.

In the past, there have been a number of stories about illegal use of police computer information. I am sure that the Greater Manchester force takes that aspect very seriously; all inquiries by police officers are logged; and a senior officer checks about 3 per cent. of all entries each month to ensure that they were made for legitimate purposes.

However, one still hears all sorts of rumours to the effect that it is possible for others to obtain information, yet one or two of my constituents found it difficult to obtain information about the identity of a car owner involved in an accident. I should like the Minister to state clearly what checks are made to ensure that police computer information is not available to debt collectors, bailiffs, and other such persons.

When 60 million items are included on a computer, and however carefully information may be segregated—I understand that the system used is known as NASCH, meaning name, age, sex, colour, and height—one is worried that it could be easy to confuse one John Smith with another John Smith. I hope that the Minister can give an assurance that there is no risk that information that should have been entered in respect of one individual is recorded in the name of another.

In order to reassure the House and the public, perhaps the Minister can explain what is the procedure when a police officer uses the powers given in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to stop someone in the street or someone driving a car. In the case of a driver, the officer will ask for his or her name, address, driving licence, and insurance documents. Either the investigating officer, using his own personal radio, or the officer accompanying him is then usually able to check those details almost immediately on the police national computer.

Can the Minister say whether other information about the individual is also presented? It is obviously important to know whether the car has been stolen or whether the driver has a criminal record. It would also be logical to know whether there are any outstanding warrants for the individual's arrest.

I understand that any such information is presented by the control computer, which can then convey it to the police officer concerned. One or two police forces are experimenting with notebook computers, and perhaps it is intended that they will receive information from the control computer. Perhaps the Minister will clarify that point.

What concerns me is the extent to which any warning signals included on the computer record are made available to the control officer and conveyed to the officer on the beat. An answer that the Under-Secretary gave me on 15 October 1990 suggested that a fair number of warning signals would be available.

I asked the Home Secretary to list the kinds of information currently held on the police national computer under the data class of warning signals. The Minister—this Minister—replied:

> "Warning signals are intended to alert officers to potential difficulties or risks in dealing with the individual. They may be used only in cases where there is supporting evidence of the need for them to be included in the record. Their inclusion and removal is at the discretion of the force which enters the record on the police national computer.
>
> The information held under the data class of warning signals is intended to indicate individuals who may possess firearms, may possess weapons, may resort to violent behaviour, may attempt to escape, may suffer from mental disorder, may possess explosives, may make false allegations against the police, may be a hazard to others as a carrier of contagious diseases (e.g., hepatitis)"—

I suppose that HIV and AIDS are included in that category—

> "may suffer from a medical condition and/or require medication, e.g., heart condition, claustrophobia, epilepsy, alcoholism, may attempt suicide, may be in unlawful possession of controlled drugs, may impersonate male or female."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 1990; Vol. 177, c. *721*.]

Some of those warning signals relate back to criminal convictions. I consider it legitimate to require that officers have such information when dealing with individuals on the pavement or in cars. Some of the information, however, will be merely conjecture, based on guesswork by police officers—albeit, on occasion, quite good guesswork. I wonder how much of that information is passed on to individual police officers. Surely, if someone has been convicted of possessing weapons or explosives, it is vital for the information to be passed on as quickly as possible, so that the officer concerned can take it into account.

I am not sure about the question of persons suffering from mental disorder. The trouble is that, as soon as anyone is given a piece of information, he will tend to treat the person involved in a slightly different way as a result. Occasionally I attend functions with my wife. If I am introduced as "Gill's husband", I am treated in a certain way; if I am introduced as a Member of Parliament, I am generally treated in a very different way.

On social occasions, of course, that does not matter. However, if a police officer is suddenly told by control that the member of the public with whom he is dealing may be suffering from a mental disorder, he may start to deal with that individual differently, and in a way that may not be particularly helpful. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us at whose discretion all the information is passed on —mainly with a view to protecting the officer concerned, if any risk is posed to him, but also with a view to protecting the individual from being treated in a different way by that officer.

Let me also ask the Minister to deal with the whole question of the inclusion of suspicions. I pointed out at the beginning that the Lindop committee had said that suspicions should be dealt with differently. Two studies have been made of police records relating to suspicions, one in the Lothian and Borders region in 1982 and the other in the Thames Valley in 1984. The Minister may tell me that there is a much more up-to-date set of statistics relating to police suspicions. I understand, however, that in 1982, in the Lothian and Borders region, there was an entry on the computer for one in six of the population suggesting some kind of suspicion. In 1984, the statistic for the Thames Valley was one in 10.

That is a large number of people in those two areas to have been entered on the computer. Had that led to a dramatic detection of crime, it would have been good, but I understand that the surveys then carried out suggest that in only 0·03 per cent. of detected crime did the suspicions on the police national computer lead to convictions. I hope

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

that the Minister will be able to tell us that more recent studies show that the number of suspicions, as a percentage of the population, has been dramatically reduced and that the detection rate has been much better.

One understands why information should be put on the computer in the first place. The question that one has to ask, however, is how quickly that information is used. When children are molested, for example, people come forward with information. The police draw up a list of five or six people who, it is alleged, were seen in the vicinity and upon whom suspicion falls. It is perfectly legitimate for the police to have that information. In the past, a notice was usually put up in the local police station. When somebody had been convicted of the offence, or no other offences had been committed for some time, the names were removed from the police station notice board—the police needed the space there—and put in a file or destroyed. The temptation now, however, is to leave the information on the police national computer. Although the information was absolutely accurate in the case of one person who was apprehended, in the case of the other individuals it was completely mistaken.

Can the Minister tell us how information is taken off the police national computer? DNA information was collected for one purpose many years previously in the case of Ray Williams. It then turned up in another court case much later. How many entries on the police national computer are deleted each week? Is the Minister confident that when information is no longer relevant, because somebody has been convicted of the offence, the information relating to other people is removed as soon as possible?

Furthermore, if information is to be sent abroad, will other police forces be told that we, unlike some of them, do not separate suspicion from factual information on our computer? Most people here would be very worried if information about them turned up in Greece, or in other European Community countries, based upon suspicion. The safeguards here may be very good, but they may not be so well understood by a police officer in another country who read about that suspicion.

I understand that the only guidelines for the police national computer were produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers in 1987. The guidelines contain a foreword by the Data Protection Registrar who had a few reservations about the guidelines. He said that they sounded all right, but that he would like to know what was happening in practice. Those guidelines were produced for the police national computer mark I. It is now almost five years since they were published. It is certainly five years since they were drawn up. What discussions has ACPO had with the registrar about the guidelines? Has he looked at the way that they are used by individual police forces? How many people have asked to see the data relating to them? Is the Minister satisfied that the 1987 guidelines are still sufficiently detailed and effective, or does he think that they ought now to be updated?

I am interested in whether the police national computer is linked with poll tax registers, electoral rolls and telephone numbers. Every telephone directory is now available on disk. I assume that that is readily available to the police—it certainly should be, because sometimes they have the nasty task of tracing accident victims and informing the next of kin. It is therefore important for them to be able to verify addresses quickly.

Concern has been expressed about people's HIV status appearing on returns. I hope that the Minister will give us some more idea of the circumstances in which people's HIV status will be entered on the computer.

The police national computer has a list of prostitutes, but I understand that it applies only to London. Are lists being kept by other big cities? Will the Minister confirm that the list contains male and female prostitutes, and what conditions apply to removing names from that list? I assume that people are put on the list if they have been connected with an offence relating to prostitution or have been cautioned. It is reasonable and sensible that, if the police are trying to implement a rational policy whereby, first, someone is cautioned and then prosecuted, that information should be available.

I make no complaint about such information being kept, but I am worried about it appearing on the police national computer when the original request had nothing to do with prostitution. Suppose someone's name is entered on the computer as having been convicted of prostitution in London and they report an assault in York or perhaps somewhere totally different. It would be perfectly reasonable for the police to check their address and details such as car ownership on the computer. Does the computer then disclose their conviction for prostitution? If that information became available to the police officer investigating the assault, would it affect the way in which he pursued the investigation? Will the Minister assure us that information on someone's behaviour as a prostitute would be accessed only if they were being charged for similar offences?

The Government should have made a statement on the way in which the police national computer operates; it should not have been necessary for me or the National Council for Civil Liberties to prise information from them. The police and the Government can be proud of the police national computer because it fights crime, but it is important that they offer assurance to the general public that it cannot be misused and does result in people being dealt with differently.

I apoligise for putting a long list of questions to the Minister, but I gave him advance notice and I hope that he will answer most of them.

9.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I am glad that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) selected this subject for tonight's debate. Numerous questions have been asked in the House about the police national computer, but to my knowledge this is the first opportunity we have had in recent times to discuss wider issues. As the hon. Gentleman said, he let me know some of his particular areas of interest in advance. I am grateful for that because it enables me to provide him with a fuller response on those points than I might otherwise have been able to do. However, he has added some detailed questions. I shall read his speech and where I am unable to reply as fully as I might, I shall write to him.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I shall make a few general observations to set this important subject in context.

The police national computer has been in operation since 1974. It has become an established part of police operations. Many police officers today, even in the higher ranks, cannot remember carrying out their police duties without the assistance of the computer, and it is now as much a part of police back-up as the police car and police radio. That is what it is, a tool to help police officers carry out their difficult task of investigating and detecting crime and bringing offenders to justice.

The police national computer is one of the most comprehensive record systems in the world and it gives police officers across the country rapid access to vital information round the clock, every day of the year. In seconds police officers can obtain details of a stolen car or a wanted person, and establish whether an offender has previous convictions for serious crimes. The police service takes this service for granted, and that is how it should be.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State formally unveiled the new police national computer on 17 November last year. The new system continues the services provided by its predecessor, but it takes advantage of the latest developments in technology to provide a high quality service in the most cost-effective way. The transition to the new system went very smoothly, and those involved in the Home Office and in the police forces deserve congratulations on this significant achievement. But replacing the old by the new is not the end of the matter. The police are increasingly looking to technology —and to information technology in particular—to help them combat increasing crime. We are, therefore, proposing to provide a number of new information services which the police believe will make a significant contribution to their operational effectiveness. These will necessarily have to be spread over the next five or six years as, and when, resources become available.

Plans are being prepared for a new communications network which would enable rapid and cost-effective exchanges of information between the police national computer and forces, and between police forces themselves. This could be extended later to other agencies in the criminal justice system, but it has not yet been so extended.

The Government have declared their intention to computerise the national collection of criminal records currently held at the national identification bureau. Some concern has been expressed by the Select Committee on Home Affairs and others at the incompleteness and inaccuracy of the records because of the difficulties of updating the present manual system. A computerised national criminal record system on the police national computer will enable police forces to enter information directly on to the national collection. This should ensure that it is accurate and up-to-date, but the benefit would not simply be in having tidy records.

I have no doubt that, by providing instant access to comprehensive records of offenders, the national criminal records system will become an indispensable aid to the better functioning of the whole of the criminal justice system. It will be of significant benefit to the police in investigating and detecting crime. Comprehensive and accurate information on antecedent offences will assist in the prosecution of cases and in sentencing, and it will help the prison service to determine the appropriate prison regime. This is a major project which will be introduced in phases over a number of years.

It should be clear from what I have said so far that the police national computer is exactly that—for use by the police in the United Kingdom. The use of the computer is subject to guidelines agreed and approved by the police service. How it is used, and by whom, is monitored by the police national computer organisation, and auditors in forces and in the police national computer organisation ensure that the security and operational procedures in forces are complied with.

Apart from the police forces—and here I move on to one of the hon. Gentleman's questions—only the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise have direct access to the PNC, but they can see only some of the information and only to read it. They are not able to enter or to change data. The information held on the PNC can be disclosed via the police to a wide range of bodies. They are listed in the data protection registration for PNC and continental police forces cannot themselves retrieve information from the PNC.

The chief police officers are responsible for ensuring that PNC terminals——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: What will happen under the Trevi proposals? Is it intended that there should never be an interchange of information directly by computer but only by request between all European Community police forces?

Mr. Lloyd: The nature of closer interchange is already being discussed. The hon. Gentleman is right on that. There has been no agreement on the subject and, at present, no police force on the continent can take information from the PNC and no such police force has access to it. If a continental police force requests particular help from the police forces here, the police in their own judgment may release what information they think it desirable to release in the common fight against crime.

The chief police officers are responsible for ensuring that the terminals are sited in secure locations away from public view and operated only by properly trained and authorised personnel. Security is maintained by terminal operators using unique identification and password codes to gain access to the system. The communications network is designed to prevent unauthorised access to the system from external sources. A full list of the security measures that forces should take in relation to the computer system is set out in the code of practice of the Association of Chief Police Officers. Information on PNC is not generally restricted to officers of a certain rank. The level of access for operational purposes is determined by role rather than by rank.

I turn now to the information that is held on the national computer about which the hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions. On a number of occasions, I have been glad to set out for the hon. Member in response to his questions in the House detailed information about the contents of the computer records and how many are held on the system at any one time. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman quoted one reply this evening. This information is recorded in the *Official Report* and it would not be especially useful to dwell on it here.

I should like to emphasise that the police national computer is subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984. The various applications on the system are registered in accordance with the law, and state

[Mr. Lloyd]

the purpose for which the data is held and to whom it may be disclosed. The safeguards provided by the Act should not be dismissed lightly.

In addition, the police service itself has issued a code of practice setting out how the principles underlying the Data Protection Act should be applied to the PNC and to other police computer systems. The code has been agreed with the Data Protection Registrar and a copy is in the Library.

There are clear guidelines in the code on the manner in which information should be added to computer systems, how long it should be kept on the system and the security measures that should be taken to prevent unauthorised access. It sets out in some detail the means of complying with each of the eight principles that underpin the Data Protection Act.

The ACPO code of practice for computer systems contains a foreword by the Data Protection Registrar welcoming the code. The code is kept under review, which is one of the points to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: If the code is kept under review, is there any intention to issue an updated version with any alterations to the 1987 edition which is the one that was supplied to me when I asked for a copy?

Mr. Lloyd: I believe that it will be updated as the new computer takes on additional information, but when and at exactly what point is a matter on which I shall have to get back to the hon. Gentleman because I do not know ACPO's plans. The system belongs to the police, not to the Home Office.

The hon. Gentleman raised several other points about the information on the PNC. He asked, for example, whether one inquiry provided all the information on PNC about an individual. The answer is that information on criminal records is kept separately on vehicles and their registered keepers. Information on both can be obtained only by means of separate transactions. It is for the user to decide whether inquiries should be made of the "persons" and "vehicles" files in the course of a single inquiry. Therefore, such information is available to the officer, but he must seek the information from one file, the other or both.

As for deleting information from the PNC, this is a matter for the police. I am able to say that the national identification bureau at New Scotland Yard has removed some 60,000 criminal record entries from PNC in the past three months as part of a weeding exercise. This exercise is continuing. The code of practice which I referred to earlier recommends specified periods for the retention of data.

Generally, PNC records of convictions are weeded out after about 20 years. No special exercise is undertaken to take from the record any non-factual information, but forces should ensure that it is kept up-to-date when submitting information about new convictions.

The Lindop report, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, recognised that some police computer systems may need to keep "intelligence" as well as factual information. The ACPO code of practice makes it quite clear that officers originating information on a computer should clearly distinguish opinions from matters of fact —and they do, so the status of the information is apparent when it is accessed.

The PNC records may also contain markers about the health of the subject, which may be helpful to police officers. There are some 5·5 million records on the "persons" file, but it is not known how many have such "markers" because they system cannot be searched for these, but only by a person's name.

As the hon. Gentleman dwelt on it for some time, I know that he is concerned that some of that personal information may be available to a police officer and may modify his actions. In fact, the information is there so that the experienced police officer may make a judgment on how he might deal more appropriately with a particular person. As that can often have implications for the officer's safety, it would be quite wrong not to have such information available.

The PNC does not have links to any local electoral or poll tax registers. A number of police forces have adapted terminals to make automatic inquiries on the Phonebase. This is a computer service provided by British Telecom for the ordinary directory inquiries information. The inquiry transactions do not pass through the police national computer.

As for passing factual and intelligence information to other parties, it is for chief officers to decide whether and how much information from the PNC should be disclosed to others and what qualifications to attach to the disclosure.

It has been the practice for some time to disclose information on convictions for the protection of vulnerable groups, such as children; to ensure probity in the administration of justice; and for reasons of national security. An efficiency scrutiny of the national collection of criminal records last year pointed to weaknesses in the present arrangements for disclosing information, and there is pressure from a number of directions to widen the scope of disclosure. The Government are currently considering the matter and have undertaken to put forward proposals later this year for new disclosure arrangements.

Under the subject access provisions of the Data Protection Act, it is open of course to anyone to ask for any information on the PNC which relates to them. Last year, some 18,000 people exercised that right. Under the terms of the Data Protection Act, the police are not obliged to disclose information which might be prejudicial to the prevention or detection of crime or the apprehension or prosecution of offenders. That seems to me to be eminently sensible.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: What about HIV status or mental health? Would that information be disclosed if inquiries were made? The information is more for individuals' protection than for the protection of police officers. Would that simply be at the discretion of individual police forces?

Mr. Lloyd: That information would have to be released under the terms of the Act and I have just read out what those terms are. If in a particular case the information was there but could not be properly withheld on any one of those bases, it would have to be revealed. When I write to the hon. Gentleman, as clearly I will have to on a number of points, I should like to confirm that my interpretation is correct.

I have not yet dealt with the hon. Gentleman's question about the index of prostitutes held by the Metropolitan police. It is not on the PNC; it is a card index system kept by the Metropolitan police to comply with the provision of the Street Offences Act 1959, which requires that a record be kept of common prostitutes. Therefore, it concerns women only.

The PNC has played an important part in police operations for many years. The new system has proved its worth. I have no doubt that it will continue to play a vital role in assisting the police in the fight against crime in the years to come. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for providing me with the opportunity for saying so. I have answered many of his questions, but I am aware that I have not fully addressed several and that I have given some answers that I wish to confirm. I will do so in a letter that I shall write to him.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Low Flying

1. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received on low flying; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): My Department has recently received a number of representations from hon. Members and the general public on matters relating to military low-flying training.

Mr. Kirkwood: May I add to those representations the ones that have been made to me locally by committees responsible for organising the summer common riding festivals in the central Borders and Scotland? It does not take much imagination to understand the effect of a Tornado flying at 250 knots and at 250 ft, on a cavalcade of 200 horses on top of the Border hills. Will the Minister consider increasing the current exclusion zones of 1 nautical mile to about 5 nautical miles in order to give those cavalcades some protection?

Mr. Carlisle: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his question. I have considered the point carefully. As he knows, we are always ready to give an avoidance of 1 mile on each side of the tracks used by these riders. The problem is that there are 75 ridings a year and to give a wider berth would concentrate our low flying over other parts of the countryside to the detriment of the inhabitants there. We have had few complaints from those taking part in the ridings and nearly half the ridings take place at weekends when there is little low flying. I do not believe that the case has been made for a change in our policy.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Do my right hon. and hon. Friends agree that if we are to have an effective Royal Air Force, it is essential that our pilots are given the best possible training, including training in operating at below the level of enemy radar? Do my right hon. and hon. Friends agree that the magnificent and heroic performance of our pilots in the Gulf thoroughly vindicates the training programme that we have had up to now? Will they accept that in Lincolnshire, where we have more RAF stations than any other part of the country, there is wide appreciation of those facts?

Mr. Carlisle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the realistic way in which he faces the problem. In Lincolnshire we are proud of the role of the RAF and its life in our county. It might be helpful to know that it is planned that low flying by jets will decline by about 30 per cent. over the next three years. In the worst-affected areas, such as the Lake District, the Borders and Wales, we are establishing community relations officers to provide a closer link with local people.

Trident

2. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the Trident programme.

3. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects to place the order for the fourth Trident submarine.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): The Trident programme continues on time towards its in-service date at an estimated final cost of £10,518 million. This marks a further small reduction against last year's estimate and an overall real reduction of £3 billion against the original 1982 forecast.

We plan to place the order for the fourth Trident submarine with VSEL at Barrow as soon as contract negotiations have been satisfactorily completed.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Secretary of State accept that the debate on Trident in Scotland is not on whether we should have three or four boats or on the number of warheads per missile but on whether we should proceed with expenditure which, over its lifetime, could amount to £23,000 million on a useless, dangerous military white elephant? Does the Secretary of State accept that there has not been, is not and will not be a majority in Scotland for the Trident missile system and that, ultimately, its deployment will depend on the consent not of the Westminster Parliament but of the Scottish people, and it will not be forthcoming?

Mr. King: I have not met many Scottish people who wish to be left exposed to the nuclear blackmail that could come from the huge nuclear arsenal which will remain for many years on the continent and in Russia. The Scottish people whom I meet who work in the shipyards at Yarrow take pride in building ships for the Royal Navy whose orders would presumably be lost to them if they had the pleasure of being represented by an SNP policy. I do not think that the 23,000 people presently involved in the Trident programme think that their efforts are wasted. They are proud of their contribution to the essential safeguarding of our country.

Mr. Arnold: What does the Secretary of State believe to be the Russian assessment of our Trident programme and, indeed, their assessment of British public opinion on the subject?

Mr. King: The whole world had the opportunity of hearing on television what President Yeltsin thought. He said that the number of nuclear weapons at the disposal of the United Kingdom was not comparable with theirs and that, therefore, the matter was not worth discussion. The Opposition have complained for years that our determination to maintain an essential minimum safeguard for our country with a nuclear deterrent was somehow an obstacle to the necessary task of reducing the overblown nuclear arsenals of the super-powers, but President Yeltsin dealt with their arguments in one wholly destructive answer.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Secretary of State confirm that fully two thirds of the costs of Trident have already been spent or contractually committed by the present Government? Will he further confirm that the consequences of the Scottish National party's policies would be to deprive many hundreds of people of their employment at Rosyth and on the Clyde while still leaving Scotland at risk from the consequences of a nuclear attack on Barrow or on the north of England? We would have all the risk but none of the advantages.

Mr. King: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support which I take to be absolutely unequivocal support for the Trident programme. I wish I thought that his colleagues were beginning to share that idea—perhaps we have an alliance here. Not all the expenditure is committed. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues can save money if they do not believe in the nuclear deterrent, and it is high time that they told the country what their priorities are.

Mr. Franks: The Secretary of State will be aware of the further 600 redundancies announced yesterday in the shipyards in Barrow which will bring to 4,500 the number of jobs lost since "Options for Change" was announced about 18 months ago. Will he therefore take this opportunity to emphasise the employment aspect as well as the strategic importance of the fourth submarine? Will he also note the observations of Barrow Labour party which has described the Opposition's promise to give work equivalent to that involved in a fourth submarine as ignorant and ill-informed?

Mr. King: Clearly, I heard with disappointment the announcement made by VSEL yesterday. I note that 10,400 are presently employed. It is a disappointment that there are to be 600 redundancies, but there is a continuing significant level of employment in defence at Barrow which is dependent on it and which has been sustained by the Government's commitment to a strong defence. I weep for Barrow's prospects were there conceivably any change in Government, because the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has said that the Opposition would replace a cancelled fourth boat with equivalent work only to be denounced by his own candidate in Barrow who used the words "ignorant and ill-informed".

Mr. O'Neill: Will the Secretary of State explain to the House the confusion that arose yesterday following the Prime Minister's statement on the United Nations meeting? The confusion arose between the subsequent press briefings given by the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Prime Minister's statements about what were likely to be the maximum number of warheads on the Trident programme. Although I recognise that for obvious reasons the Secretary of State will not want to be locked or painted into a figure of 512 as the maximum, which is what it would be, will he tell the House whether, in the light of last week's discussions with President Yeltsin and the changes that have taken place since Christmas, the Government are now considering the minimum deterrent to be somewhat lower than they had previously considered it necessary to be?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman knows the situation perfectly well. We have never gone beyond the statement that we will have a maximum of 128 warheads per submarine. That is our position and that is where we remain. We have also made it absolutely clear that we will ensure that our deterrent is effective and absolutely credible, and that it puts real fear into any potential aggressor about the damage that he could suffer if he were to attack this country. That is our position and we have made it absolutely clear that we will do that within the terms of operating a minimum deterrent, which is obviously the sensible way to go.

The hon. Gentleman seems to be totally ignorant of and unable to adjust to President Yeltsin's announcement in which he made it absolutely clear that our determination to maintain a minimum deterrent is no obstruction to the determination that he and President Bush have to reduce the nuclear arsenals of the super-powers.

Defence Expenditure

4. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates he has made of the effect on the reactive capability of United Kingdom defence industries of a reduction in defence expenditure to the Western European Union average.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): We have no intention of reducing defence expenditure to the WEU average; we have made no estimate of the implications of such a reduction.

Mr. Paice: I thank my right hon. Friend. Does he agree that in this very uncertain world, if such a reduction were to take place, it would seriously jeopardise this country's ability to defend itself? That policy would destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs in defence industries, including many in my constituency, yet it has been endorsed on no fewer than three occasions by large majorities at the Labour party conference.

Mr. Clark: Yes, that is right. That policy has been endorsed by majorities of more than 2 million pounds—*[Interruption.]*—members on each occasion. It is especially interesting that, leaving aside the damage that such a policy would do to the services by wiping out 10 frigates, four submarines and four squadrons of Tornados, there has never been a suggestion in any of the texts that money would be returned to the taxpayer. In every resolution, there has been a reference to making the money available for other "social and economic priorities", thus confirming that the Labour party is the party of high taxation. Labour regards reducing taxes and defending ourselves as equally sinful.

Mr. Rogers: It is a bit hypocritical both for the questioner and for the Minister, who is a representative of the Government of unemployment, to criticise potential job losses under a Labour Government. The Secretary of State has presided over the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs in the defence industry in recent years. Since June 1990—[Hon. Members: "Question!"] Since June 1990, 74,000 jobs have been lost in the defence industry. Since the Prime Minister came to power, 1,000 jobs have been lost each month. Some 4,500 jobs have been lost in Barrow. What a bunch of hypocritical mealy-mouthed people! When will the Minister stop the cuts in the defence industry or at least set up a defence diversification agency to help people such as those in Barrow who will be put out of work?

Mr. Clark: It is always interesting to note that the moment one reminds Labour Members of their party's commitment to high taxation, they lose control of the argument completely and deliver tirades along the lines of that to which the hon. Gentleman has just subjected the House. We regret very much the fact that there have been job losses in the defence industry—of course—and the figure is 25,000—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman will not even listen to the reply to his argument it is his loss. The total losses have been of the order of 25,000, but the fact remains that there are still more than 140,000 people directly involved in the defence industry and more than 120,000 indirectly involved. Every one of those workers knows exactly what his likely fate will be should the Labour party ever return to power.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is not it a strong strategic interest of the United Kingdom to maintain an effective and comprehensive defence industrial base, in case international circumstances change? In that regard, does my right hon. Friend support the WEU proposal of a European surveillance satellite system to engender confidence and ensure that arms control measures are adhered to?

Mr. Clark: It will be increasingly important to ensure that all surveillance is comprehensive and very widely directed. In no sector is that more important than in the field of nuclear proliferation. All countries that are committed to non-proliferation and all the signatories to the treaty must be prepared both for greater resources to go into the inspection process and to submit to greater surveillance.

Nuclear Weapons

5. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to encourage non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Tom King: The greatest immediate risk of proliferation follows the disintegration of the Soviet Union with its massive nuclear stockpile and large number of nuclear scientists. We are actively involved in discussion with all the former Soviet republics where nuclear weapons are at present located—particularly with Russia. We are also giving full support to the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 687, for the elimination of the Iraqi nuclear weapons programme.

Mrs. Fyfe: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Does he want the British public to realise that 128 warheads per submarine equals 512 warheads for four submarines, and that that equates to 2,560 Hiroshimas? Even if he seeks to deploy fewer warheads per boat than the maximum possible, why should not other countries follow his example and say that that is also their ideal of a minimum deterrent? Does non-proliferation apply to everyone else but not to us?

Mr. King: The hon. Lady seems quite unaware of the fact that, not long ago, I announced from the Dispatch Box what is effectively a halving of our sub-strategic nuclear weapons. NATO will now restrict itself to only one nuclear system, as opposed to the Soviet Union—or Russia now—with three, and we in NATO can point to the fact that we will soon have about one tenth the number of nuclear warheads that we had 10 years ago. I hope that the hon. Lady will recognise the changes that have taken place. I remind her that, following President Yeltsin's recent visit and the welcome changes in connection with what is a hugely large arsenal of nuclear weapons, the top priority of proliferation at present is to ensure that we take action in the ways that I described in my answer. The fact that the hon. Lady rose with a prepared supplementary, ignoring the significance of the massive problems of the time, does her little credit.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my right hon. Friend agree that even if one ignores what is happening in the former USSR, there are other countries in the world that are potential aggressors and which either have nuclear capacity or may be near to acquiring it? Would not it be the height of folly to give away our own independent nuclear deterrent while any potential aggressor has the ability to strike at us?

Mr. King: I entirely agree. I was asked about proliferation. We have to face the fact that there is a bigger risk of nuclear proliferation at present than the world has ever known. As a result, while the right approach is to take the most positive steps that we can to help to deal with that problem, we have a duty to our own people also to ensure that we maintain that elementary, basic, minimum safeguard of our own nuclear deterrent. Anybody who dreamt of surrendering that basic safeguard at this time would be doing the gravest disservice to current and possibly to future generations in Britain.

Mr. O'Neill: May I welcome the attempts that the Government are making, in conjunction with the Russians and the Confederation of Independent States, to reduce and dismantle the nuclear weapons arsenals? That is a most welcome and urgent step. In the current discussions about the size of the nuclear arsenal, is the Secretary of State still committed to bringing on stream another replacement for the WE177 free-fall bomb? Although that may not be against a literal interpretation of the wording of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, would not such a move be a gross affront to the potential proliferators who are reconsidering the need to indulge in the acquisition of nuclear weapons? Would it not be better for the country and for the nuclear proliferation process for the Government to abandon their next generation of air-launched cruise missiles?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman's supplementary question ignored the fact that we are talking about NATO policy. In fact, we are talking about a proposed change in NATO policy, that is what matters—not about a unilateral decision by the Government—which was agreed at the London NATO summit. We are considering the options at the moment, and I have nothing to add to that.

Mr. Dickens: Will my right hon. Friend please confirm that it is absolutely necessary for us to have a minimum deterrent so that the people of the United Kingdom are safe? In terms of that deterrent, is it not right that when a submarine is cruising anywhere in the world's oceans, any potential aggressor who attacks the United Kingdom will stand the risk of unacceptable and devastating retaliation from us?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; that is precisely the point. Indeed, that is precisely the point which was so clearly recognised by President Yeltsin. We have criticised the building-up of such a huge nuclear arsenal, but my hon. Friend may have noticed that President Yeltsin is talking of reducing the number of warheads to 2,500, which he regards as reducing to a deterrent. We believe that it is right to have a minimum deterrent so that no potential aggressor can think that this country could be attacked and that they could be unaffected by any retaliation.

Ex-Service Personnel (Housing)

6. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to consult local authorities on housing requirements for ex-service personnel.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): In consultation with the Department of the Environment and the Scottish Office, which are represented on MOD's housing task force, my Department has recently been in contact with all local authorities, seeking information on their arrangements for the provision of housing for ex-service personnel.

Mr. Michie: The Minister has said that his Department has contacted the local authorities, but when will the Government accept that the local authorities have the strategy and the enabling powers to make provision for housing, especially for the homeless and perhaps for some of the 40,000 personnel who will be leaving the armed forces in the near future? Why is the task force in consultation with the Housing Corporation but refusing to consult the local authorities which have that power? Is it not a fact that the Government still have such a bigoted bias against local authorities that they will even put at risk the future housing of our ex-service families?

Mr. Hamilton: Let me first put the hon. Gentleman right about the figure of 40,000—40,000 is the number that we have put on the reduction of personnel in the Army, but much of that reduction will be achieved by natural wastage. I remind the hon. Gentleman that about 30,000 people leave the armed forces every year anyway. We are expecting in excess of 10,000 redundancies, which will be spread over three years. We must put those numbers in perspective.

On the housing task force, we feel that the representatives of the Department of the Environment are well aware of the position of the local authorities in relation to housing. Their representations have been valuable. In addition, Lady Anson, the chairman of the Association of District Councils, has been in touch with my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces.

Sir Giles Shaw: Does my right hon. Friend accept that his contact with the Housing Corporation must be the best way forward and can be usefully developed? Will he further accept that service men are looking for the opportunity to obtain a rung on the ownership ladder and that the Housing Corporation and its satellite housing associations can most assuredly provide that? Is my right hon. Friend confident that nationwide assistance will be available to enable those excellent people to be rehabilitated in our community?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes. We are in touch on that. The question arises whether some of our married quarters may be sold to housing associations who will give priority to service men. Many different options are being considered. My hon. Friend might be interested to know that we sent out a questionnaire to 5,293 people who volunteered for redundancy and 76 per cent. of them returned it. Of those people who had volunteered for redundancy, 49 per cent. already owned their own homes and another 34 per cent. intended to buy. Therefore, the majority of those who are to be made redundant will either have their own homes or will buy them shortly after.

Mr. Cartwright: When the Minister next talks to the local authorities about this issue, will he point out that many of them no longer give rehousing priority to ex-service personnel, but expect them to go through the normal homeless families procedures? Does he agree that that is a pretty poor way in which to treat people who have given their lives to the service of their country?

Mr. Hamilton: I absolutely accept everything that the hon. Gentleman says. One of our concerns is that our ex-service men should not be in temporary accommodation. That is why we are considering the use of our married quarters to ensure that that does not happen.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my right hon. Friend consider further the approach that I have made to the Secretary of State that vacant married quarters in civilian areas around army camps should be co-ordinated into my right hon. Friend's scheme? If they are to remain empty at any particular time short-held leases could be used so that the barracks could be used for local housing rather than stay vacant.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, this has always been a problem, but it has become worse recently, I am afraid, because of the people who have been made redundant and who have come back from Germany. The stocks of empty houses may be larger at this time. I take that point and we are keeping in close contact with local authorities.

Mr. Boyes: Does the Minister accept that there is a real need and opportunity for bold and radical measures? Local housing authorities have been starved of cash for a number of years by the Government. However, local authorities and the Ministry of Defence have empty sub-standard housing on their books. Will the Minister release MOD votes to allow local authorities, in collaboration with the MOD, to bring empty housing owned by the local authorities and the MOD up to acceptable standards and then transfer it to local authority control for the express purpose of providing homes to ex-service personnel? Or will this Government's ideological opposition to council housing prevent them from doing that?

Mr. Hamilton: Most of what is being done by my Department—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading".] It is a blank piece of paper. Most of that work is carried out in conjunction with housing asociations and is financed by the Housing Corporation. On the whole, we would prefer to dispose of blocks of married quarters to housing associations rather than to local authorities. We do not exclude that possibility, but we find that when we talk to local authorities that they do not have the money to buy married quarters in the first place.

"Options for Change"

7. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further consultations he has had regarding "Options for Change", in the light of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Tom King: We have set out our plans in "Britain's Defence for the 90s" and we are proceeding to implement those over the next four years. I do not propose future reductions in the light of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and given the continuing instability in Europe and elsewhere.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Can my right hon. Friend assure the House, nevertheless, that the validity of the arguments behind "Options for Change" will be kept under constant review, not least because of the disintegration of the Warsaw pact, followed by the emergence of new power structures within the Soviet Union?

Mr. King: I appreciate that concern. One of the bases that underpinned "Options for Change" was the disintegration of the Warsaw pact, the establishment of independence in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and other former allies, the reunification of Germany and the disappearance of East Germany. We did not anticipate the rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union. There are some who advocate that, now that that has happened, the world is somehow a safer place. We do not believe that that is correct. We believe that the world is passing through a period of considerable instability and therefore we do not propose further reductions in our defence forces.

Sir Patrick Duffy: In any further consideration of "Options for Change" will the Minister take into account lessons from the Gulf war such as heavy lift, better intelligence especially on targeting, mine countermeasures, which may have inhibited an amphibious operation, and, above all, fire from friendly forces, which underlines the need for the IFF—identification, friend or foe—system which has so far eluded NATO?

Mr. King: I am glad to confirm that these lessons have been learnt from our consideration of the Gulf conflict. They have been discussed by both NATO and the Western European Union. Heavy lift and enhanced intelligence capability are two very specific matters that have been considered in those forums.

Defence Contracts (Devon)

8. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will visit factories in north Devon which have been involved in defence contracts and seek to maintain this link.

Mr. Alan Clark: I should be very happy to do so.

Mr. Speller: I thank my right hon. Friend for his brisk but satisfactory reply. Will he please bear in mind the fact that it is essential that, where possible, we buy from British manufacturers across the country? May I commend to him a visit to north Devon and ask him to remember Coutant's of Ilfracombe and firms like High Temperature of South Molton, Hobart's, CQC and others? It is important that we retain these excellent companies even if some of the swords become ploughshares.

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. All the firms that he has mentioned contribute to the employment of the 130,000 people who are directly concerned with the defence industry. He did not mention Cray Marine, a firm in his constituency that provides the Torpedo-handling system for the type 23s. That firm will have welcomed the recent announcement of an order for a further three of these ships.

Mr. Ashdown: When the Minister visits north Devon will he consider the matter of British equipment and pay a visit to RAF Chivenor, which is waiting for the SAR Westland helicopters that have been on order for two years? The Minister promised that this order would be taken care of shortly after the new year. Surely that time has arrived. The Minister should remember that Westland will hold its annual general meeting on 13 February. An order announced now would not only fulfil the SAR requirements but also be very welcome to Westland.

Mr. Clark: I am glad to confirm that an announcement about this order will be made shortly. Important though the right hon. Gentleman is, he is not yet in a position to issue invitations to visit Royal Air Force stations.

Dame Janet Fookes: If my right hon. Friend is going on a tour I hope that he will not forget our mutual home territory on Plymouth, which is very anxious indeed to maintain close links with the armed services. It has provided excellent service in the past, and wishes to do so in the future.

Mr. Clark: I visit Plymouth every weekend.

Plutonium

9. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there are currently any contracts with the Atomic Energy Authority for research into the fabrication of weapons components using plutonium; and whether any such work has been carried out at Harwell.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are no contracts with the AEA for research into the fabrication of weapons components using plutonium. We do place contracts with AEA, which exploits its expertise in a range of matters, including plutonium handling.

Mr. Skinner: Why is it that £40 million is being spent on the 220 building at Harwell? Does this have something to do with the transfer of work on Trident warheads from Aldermaston, which is not big enough? Is not the cry of every potential bomb-making third-world country that its nuclear work is entirely civil, even though it is, in fact, for defence purposes? It is time Britain gave a lead by stopping its nuclear proliferation.

Mr. Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman excites himself without cause. Most of the work that is done at Harwell is for the civilian sector. Indeed, the refurbishment of the 220 building results from AEA's commercial considerations and is not necessitated by Ministry of Defence contracts. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about the Ministry is the one that I have just given. Far more interesting is whether the hon. Gentleman and his Back-Bench colleagues support Labour's new nuclear defence policy—so far as anyone can understand it.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend will be aware of reports coming out of Russia of grave concern about the maintenance and decommissioning of the vast ex-Soviet nuclear stockpile. Is it possible for us to provide facilities, skills and help from the Atomic Energy Authority to help them with that difficult problem?

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. Safety is always paramount to us in those matters and we are in discussion with them to see how best we can help.

Territorial Army

10. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the future strength of the Territorial Army in Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of representations have been received.

Mr. Wallace: Can the Minister confirm that they included representations to ensure that any rundown in the Territorial Army in Scotland will not mean there being insufficient units in Scotland, to the point at which the TA will lose the goodwill of the scattered communities, particularly in the highlands and islands, in terms of recruitment? Did he also receive representations about 15 Parachute regiment to the effect that it should be allowed to continue at its five locations in Scotland? Will he take this opportunity to confirm that sufficient resources will be made available to ensure that full establishment is maintained at each of those locations for men and resources, for training and administration?

Mr. Hamilton: I am always fascinated to hear Liberals going on about resources being made available for defence, when they are committed to cutting them by 50 per cent. by the end of the century. I am never sure how their inquiries fit in with that commitment.

The reduction in Scotland will be 13 per cent. compared with a United Kingdom average of 17 per cent. So Scotland is being treated well under the measures.

The geographical spread will be very much a question of how the highland and lowland TAVRAs—the Territorial Army volunteer reserve associations—decide to allocate their resources. My hon. Friend has made it clear that no willing volunteer will be turned away and that anybody who wants to continue to serve with the TA will be able to do so, maybe not with the unit in which he is now serving, but with another unit.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Scotland's contribution to the armed forces, including the TA, far exceeds its proportion of less than 9 per cent. of the United Kingdom population? That has been recognised by the Government. That is why Scots who are interested in military and other matters will always be best served by a Conservative Government.

Mr. Hamilton: That is absolutely right. It is amazing what we hear from Opposition Members, when they intend to cut defence expenditure. The effect that that would have on Scottish defence would be devastating in terms of procurement and the employment of people in the armed forces.

Dr. Reid: Is it not a fact that on 3 July last year the Minister of State told my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) that the recruitment figures for individual battalions in Scotland would not be released on the ground of security, yet when it suited the Secretary of State's purpose, he was prepared to release figures showing 67 per cent. recruitment to 15 Parachute regiment? Can he therefore confirm that either the Secretary of State has breached the security rules or that the excuse of national security has been used merely to cover the fact that the Government made the decisions on political rather than on military grounds? Is that not why there is so much concern in Scotland among supporters of the regiment? Is he aware that there will be a wide welcome for my assurance that an incoming Labour Government will review each and every one of these decisions to ensure that the size and structure of the regiments in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom reflect our military needs, and not the political expediency of the Tory party?

Mr. Hamilton: If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that a review of defence by an incoming Labour Government, should we happen to have such an Administration, would mean more money being spent on defence, I am a Dutchman.

Defence Hot-lines

11. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what offer of assistance he has given to the member states of the former Soviet Union to assist in establishing defence hot-lines.

Mr. Tom King: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agreed with President Yeltsin in London last week that a secure direct telephone link between No. 10 and the Kremlin should be established. I also discussed with Marshal Shaposhnikov the ways in which we could establish clearer links between us and our staffs. I hope to make a further announcement about that very shortly.

Dr. Clark: Does my right hon. Friend accept that unambiguous communication is just as important now as it was during the cold war, and perhaps even more important? Will he also accept that the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union may from time to time have some apprehension, and that there may be need to give them reassurance?

Mr. King: That is precisely why my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited each of the nuclear republics of the former Soviet Union. With regard to the need for direct and close contact, I do not think that we could have had a clearer example of that than the visit of President Yeltsin and the very straight talking between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the president. In one very short and clear comment, President Yeltsin demolished all the arguments of the Labour party that somehow our deterrent is an obstacle to the reduction of the nuclear arms of the super-powers.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir George Gardiner: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major:) This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir George Gardiner: Does my right hon. Friend agree that to suggest that there is one kind of school that can cater for the needs of all kinds of pupils is an example of the naive theorising that has caused so many problems in education, which we are seeking to address today? Will he continue to press for diversity in education through grant-maintained schools, through city technology colleges and through local management of schools responsive to parents' wishes?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the premise underlying my hon. Friend's question. We will certainly continue to encourage diversity through grant-maintained schools, CTCs and locally managed schools, all of which give greater opportunity and choice to parents and pupils. We will continue to offer that choice.

Mr. Kinnock: At the time when the Prime Minister said that if his policies

"were not hurting, they were not working,"

did he realise that those policies would cause the longest recession since the 1930s?

The Prime Minister: We have taken action to ensure that we come out of this recession in a way that will ensure sustained recovery. As the Governor of the Bank of England said only yesterday,

"the conditions are now in place to underpin a . . . sustained recovery."

Mr. Kinnock: Having caused the longest recession since the 1930s, does the Prime Minister agree with the words of his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who said last month:

"the policy would not have been different even if we had known the outcome."?

The Prime Minister: Caused the recession?—Did we cause it in the United States, in Sweden, in Japan, in Australia, in New Zealand? If the right hon. Gentleman believes all that, he is certainly not capable of leading his party, let alone this country.

Mr. Kinnock: There is no question of doubt that this Government caused the recession in this country. Since the Prime Minister made the statement that I quoted, nearly 1 million jobs have been lost, there have been over 100,000 repossessions and 80,000 businesses have been lost, in those two years. This Government caused the recession, they continued the recession, and now they have not got a clue how to get out of the recession.

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. Gentleman has to say—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. Gentleman has to say is economic illiteracy. If the right hon. Gentleman is genuinely concerned about recovery, what does he think that higher taxes would do to it? What does he think that his jobs tax would do to it? What does he think that his investment tax would do to it? What does he think that his minimum wage would do to it? The policies which the right hon. Gentleman pursues would mean perpetual recession for this country.—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members please settle down?

Chancellor Kohl

Q2. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Prime Minister when he will next meet the Chancellor of Germany; and what issues he intends to discuss with him.

The Prime Minister: Chancellor Kohl and I are in frequent contact by telephone to discuss matters of mutual interest. I expect to meet him again soon, but I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Hunter: Has my right hon. Friend noticed the extent to which the German economy has suffered from the worldwide slowdown and the fact that German output has decreased during the past two months for which figures are available? Does not that conclusively show that economic difficulties are not confined to the United Kingdom, as the Opposition try to claim?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's question is more apposite than he might have imagined. He is entirely right. I have noticed that fact, even if the Opposition have not. Again, the Governor of the Bank of England noted yesterday that the recession has proved unexpectedly persistent in north America and that in continental Europe, Japan and elsewhere economic activity has slowed and unemployment has begun to rise. Only the Opposition adopt their typical stance. They ignore other countries' difficulties and concentrate solely on those in this country, to the damage of our interests.

Mr. Radice: After the two opt-outs negotiated by the Prime Minister at Maastricht, does Chancellor Kohl still think that the Prime Minister is a good European?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman had better ask Chancellor Kohl that question. I have enjoyed the closest possible co-operation with Chancellor Kohl in the past year and I intend to continue to do so in the same capacity in years to come.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Lee:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lee: The massive growth at Manchester airport since the Government have come to power—a 1,100 per cent. increase in fixed assets—has given a tremendous boost to the economy and pride of the north-west. Indeed, the north-south divide has now ceased to exist as an issue. When my right hon. Friend next has a free Saturday, will he fly up to Manchester, look at what has been achieved by the airport, and then pop over to Old Trafford to watch a first-class football side in action? It will win the first division championship, just as my right hon. Friend will certainly win the next general election.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not respond to one part of his question. Manchester airport, however, is a success story. It has benefited especially from the growth in the liberalisation of air services and, as a result, three times as many passengers now use the airport as when the Government came to office. That is a direct result of liberalisation introduced by the Government. The concept of a north-south divide was always too simplistic and sweeping. Many areas of prosperity and some of difficulty exist in each and every part of this country—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us have less barracking.

Q4. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cohen: Is the Prime Minister aware that, in my constituency of Leyton, unemployment has risen by 84 per cent. in the past 18 months? As last night the Governor of the Bank of England backtracked over the duration of the slump, will the Prime Minister now institute an urgent programme of recovery? Failing that, will he explain to my unemployed constituents why the Government consider them a "price worth paying"?

The Prime Minister: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman was not listening a few moments ago when I quoted directly the Governor of the Bank of England saying that the conditions necessary to underpin a sustained recovery are now in place.

Mr. Allason: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that a review is to be undertaken of the use by the security and intelligence agencies of informants and other sources? When he receives that final report, will he bear in mind the fact that the security intelligence agencies rely on the use of informants, and the intelligence that they receive will never be any good unless a measure of protection can be granted to those sources?

The Prime Minister: We do, of course, constantly keep these matters under review and I believe that it is important that we continue to do so.

Q5. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winnick: Is the Prime Minister proud of the fact that since the Government came into office in 1979 nearly 2·5 million full-time jobs in manufacturing have been lost, 34 jobs for every hour this wretched Government have been in office? In view of the devastation, the unemployment and the misery caused to our people, is it any wonder that the Prime Minister is so reluctant to hold the general election?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is joining the Opposition trend of seeking to talk down what manufacturing and other industries are doing. He should remember that export volumes of manufactured goods grew faster than in the United States throughout the 1980s, that manufacturing grew faster than in France or Italy during the 1980s, and that Britain exports a larger proportion of its national product than Japan, a point recognised by even the Scottish National party.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my right hon. Friend join me in sending congratulations to a Yorkshire manufacturing company, Spring Ram plc, which at the end of the month will open two new factories in my constituency, creating 400 new jobs, which is at present building two new factories in Barnsley which will create 400 new jobs, and which has a plan to create 1,100 new jobs in Bradford over the next four years?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to send my congratulations to my hon. Friend's constituents. There are, of course, many other companies up and down the country which are similarly investing and growing, and laying the foundation for prosperity in the 1990s.

Q6. **Mr. Carr:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Carr: Can the Prime Minister tell the House how he squares his vision of a classless Britain with the experience of a constituent of mine from Fulwood, who was told last May that she needed a hip replacement but that she would have to wait 14 months for the operation under the national health service, and who was told that she could have had the operation immediately had she been able to cough up £4,300?

The Prime Minister: There were no hip replacements available just a few years ago. It is now a relatively routine operation available in the national health service. Hip replacements are becoming more widely available month after month. That is the direction in which we must go to provide the best health service, the best opportunities and the best element of the classless society that I have talked about.

Mr. Norris: Does not my right hon. Friend agree that the last thing that business needs is for business rates to be brought back under the control of uncapped, loony Labour authorities who will send rates sky rocketing, as they did during the early 1980s? Will he give the House a pledge that such a crazy proposal will never be included in a manifesto issued by the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend that undertaking. It is well known to every hon. Member that under the old system, councils could put up rates by more than the rate of inflation. They did and, among other evils, they forced many jobs out of inner city areas by doing so. Those who doubt that might remember the rate rise of Labour-controlled Ealing council of 57 per cent. in 1987. They might also recollect the wriggling of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) on television the other day on precisely that problem. It would be a problem, he said. It would be a problem not just for the Labour party but for business men up and down the country.

Q7. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Welsh: Since the Government have supported independence in Russia, Lithuania and other parts of the world, when the people of Scotland democratically and peacefully vote for independence, what will the Government say to them?

The Prime Minister: This Union has served both Scotland and England well, and I would not wish to see it undermined. The proposals of the Labour party, the Liberal Democratic party and the Scottish National party would undermine that relationship that has served us so well in the Union. Devolution is not just a matter for Scotland; it is a matter for the whole United Kingdom. If an Assembly were given tax-raising powers, how would that fit in with the other fiscal arrangements? What would the increased taxation do to prosperity in Scotland? The hon. Gentleman should put a fair proposal before the Scottish people, not the half-baked one that he has made.

Mr. Gregory: Will my right hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has not yet asked a question of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Gregory: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will continue as the party of denationalisation, and confirm to the electorate of York that the Conservative party will not take away the shares of those who have invested in Northern Electric, British Telecom and other such denationalised companies?

The Prime Minister: I can give that assurance to my hon. Friend. The denationalisation programme has been good not only for the consumer, but for share owning and the improvement of both investment and wealth in this country. We believe in those propositions and we shall continue to support them.

Q8. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jones: I am sure that the Prime Minister will have enjoyed reading the *Western Mail* last Saturday, where he will have seen the results of a telephone survey showing that the people of Wales now support the setting up of a Welsh Parliament by a margin of four to one. When will the Prime Minister acknowledge that the aspirations of the Welsh and Scottish people cannot be sidelined for ever, and when will Parliament act?

The Prime Minister: I seem to recall that there was a referendum once before on devolution in Wales when there appeared to be a majority in favour. But the reality was that the referendum showed that there was no majority, and the people of Wales recognised that it would be in the best interests of their country and the United Kingdom to sustain the present arrangements.

Security Forces

3.31 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, on matters appertaining to the rule of law, the primacy of the police and confidence in the security forces in Northern Ireland? You will recall, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That matter is for the Government, not me.

Mr. McNamara: Mr. Speaker, you will recall that at Question Time last Thursday the Government were twice asked to make a statement on the subject at the conclusion of the Nelson trial. I had privately written to the Secretary of State about that. The matters related to the honesty and integrity of the British Army, connivance in terrorist offences, the role of the police and security forces, and plea bargaining to prevent full public scrutiny of the issues in the House and before the British public.

May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to seek some way to force, make, persuade or otherwise cajole the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who has responsibility for such matters to make a statement to the House?

Mr. Speaker: I have received no request for a statement, but the hon. Gentleman's point of order will have been heard by those Ministers with responsibility for such matters.

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That the Matter of education in Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

Caravan Sites (Amendment)

3.32 pm

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend Part II of the Caravan Sites Act 1968; to make further provision in respect of encampments of travelling people; and for connected purposes.

I am asking—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are not remaining for the ten-minute Bill leave the Chamber quietly, particularly those below the Gangway?

Sir Michael McNair Wilson: I ask the House to give my Bill a First Reading, conscious that many hon. Members also face problems arising from the illegal encampment of people who may be gipsies, but, who, as in my constituency, often belong to other groups variously titled —hippies, travellers, new age travellers, tinkers, drop-outs, didicoys and peace people. I submit that the Caravan Sites Act 1968 is no longer relevant to meet the difficulties that such people create.

The ineffectiveness of the present law was vividly illustrated in west Berkshire recently when we faced the encampment of people who described themselves as new age travellers and who decided to park 20 vehicles illegally on a county council byway. The local people were infuriated by the camp and asked the police to move the travellers on. The police demurred on the ground that, as the county council had not designated a site according to part II of the 1968 Act, there was nowhere for the travellers to go. That prompted me to write to Berkshire county council asking when it intended to designate a site in the west of the county to meet the travellers' needs. The council responded that the Act referred only to sites for gipsies and that, as the travellers were not gipsies, the council had no responsibility for the matter. I then wrote to the council asking how it identified a gipsy from a traveller, but I did not receive an answer.

Strictly speaking, the county council is right. Within the strictest interpretation, the 1968 Act applies to gipsies and not to travellers. It seems to me that the Act should be amended, the word "gipsy" dropped, and the phrase—suggested, I think, by the National Gipsy Council—

"persons of a nomadic way of life"

substituted. At the very least, it would mean a reappraisal of the numbers of people involved in travelling, and thus a reassessment of the number of sites required. The figure of 11,544 gipsy caravans given in 1990 could increase dramatically, and the sooner that we know the scale of the problem, the sooner we can do something about it.

Despite the fact that the 1968 Act is now 24 years old, the Department of the Environment has set no time limit within which county councils must meet their statutory responsibility to designate sites. That would be another requirement of my Bill. Every county should have at least one site, and I suggest that that should happen within the next 12 months.

I go further. The number of people who have taken up a nomadic way of life has increased, and it is probably still increasing. I do not know why they choose that way of life, but that is their right in a free society and we must recognise it. If we are to avoid the endless aggravation that such people as travellers cause virtually wherever they go, the illegality of their encampments, the mess and rubbish that they leave behind, their lack of sanitation, and the fear of local people that travellers pay little attention to the law, cut timber at will, and poach—in other words, if we are to create some measure of harmony between modern nomads and the community—local authorities should be required to appoint a travellers' liaison officer whose task, much like that of community relations officers, would be to liaise with travelling groups, farmers and their representatives, such as the National Farmers Union, local land owners, and the police. I believe that some counties already have such a person.

In turn, such groups of interested people, working with a local authority, could seek to create a pattern of short-stay transit sites, inconspicuous to the public but maintained by the local authority for travellers. Travelling groups should be able to discover from the local authority where sites are located, and those refusing to use them could be made subject to severe fines.

Clearly, the size of transit sites would vary according to the neighbourhood, but at least some should be able to cope with large vehicle convoys, such as those which make their way to Stonehenge, or which have over the past two years chosen the common around Hungerford as a weekend site.

Present police powers need revising. Currently, policing illegal encampments is a costly business. A large site can tie down as many as 100 constables and cost tens of thousands of pounds, yet the police have limited powers. Generally, they use section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 to move people on, but that legislation does not apply to vehicles, animals, or the travellers' other belongings. As the assistant chief constable of Thames Valley wrote in a recent letter to me:

"It follows therefore that if we were to exercise a power of arrest in circumstances which warranted it, then the families of the persons arrested would still be able to remain with their property on the land."

It was put to me that there should be a new offence of aggravated trespass on land to meet that problem. As matters stand, a district council can obtain an eviction order from a local court when dealing with illegal encampments on common land, but for the police to move illegal encampments from private property requires a much more drawn-out procedure. I know that the police would welcome a simplified court order system.

I wonder whether showmen's vehicles, and the right or otherwise to park them at the side of the road, really belong in the 1968 Act as it is presently drawn.

I have outlined some of the changes to present legislation that, in my opinion, could bring some order to a situation that is rapidly getting out of control. I hope that it is clear from my remarks that the law should strike a new balance between the obvious rights of ordinary people living in towns and villages to be spared the nuisance, aggravation, and hooliganism associated with illegal encampments and the fact that many thousands of people prefer a nomadic way of life—and that simply to try to move them on to somebody else's patch is no solution. Quite simply, the Act must be amended.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Sir Michael McNair-Wilson, Sir Anthony Durant, Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. Mark Wolfson, Mr. Tim Smith and Mr. John Watts.

CARAVAN SITES (AMENDMENT)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson accordingly presented a Bill to amend Part II of the Caravan Sites Act 1968; to make further provision in respect of encampments of travelling people; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 February and to be printed. [Bill 64.]

Local Government Finance

Mr. Speaker: In view of the large number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to put a 10-minute limit on speeches between 6 pm and 8 pm. I hope, however, that those who are called before and after those times will bear the limit in mind, so that all who wish to speak may be called.

3.40 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move,

That the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1992-93 (House of Commons Paper No. 188), a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be approved.

It may be convenient also to consider the following motions:

That the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) (No. 2) Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 190), a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be approved.

That the Population Report (England) (No. 3) (House of Commons Paper No. 189), a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (No. 3) (House of Commons Paper No. 191), a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be approved.

Many of us have taken part in these annual debates before, but they should not be seen as any sort of ritual. The House should explore thoroughly and carefully the allocation of £33 billion of taxpayers' funds: that is the element of Government support for some £42 billion of local authority expenditure.

It is appropriate on occasions such as this to remind the House of the difference between the Labour party's approach to taxation and expenditure levels, and that of the Government. We know from long and bitter experience that high levels of taxation are the hallmark of the Labour party in national government and that rising taxation levels are characteristic of that party in local government.

This year, the average community charge is some £60 higher in Labour-controlled metropolitan boroughs than in those controlled by the Conservative party. In London, the gap is even wider. It is exactly the same story in the shire counties: average charges are £80 higher in Labour districts than in Conservative districts. In independent and Social and Liberal Democrat-controlled authorities, they are £37 higher. This is a national pattern, which both the House and a wider audience will no doubt wish to bear carefully in mind.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Last year, the Isle of Wight received a higher settlement than any other shire county in England. The authority has nearly £3 million on its balances, but the Liberal Democrats are considering cutting £1·5 million from the education budget—although, when they fought the last county election, they ran down the county balances to £250,000 and ignored the advice of the district auditor. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend could spare the time to join me in a rally and march in Newport, Isle of Wight, this weekend, when we shall go to county hall to protest to the Liberal Democrats about this exhibition of sheer political spite.

Mr. Heseltine: That is a most generous invitation, I must say. I feel torn between two options. Perhaps I can combine making a speech in Eastbourne on Saturday to the Young Conservatives, the largest political youth

[Mr. Heseltine]

organisation in the country—we shall also have to deal with the problems caused by Liberal Democrats in the House, if only temporarily—with a dash across country to support my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in his constituency, and a detour to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field).

On mature reflection, that will be stretching the ingenuity of the transport infrastructure in this country further than is credible, despite the remarkable improvements in that infrastructure for which the Government, alone, are responsible. I must leave it to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight to use his customary eloquence to put the case, which is obviously a formidable one. I look forward to reading the coverage in the national and local press, which I am sure is well deserved.

Where was I?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why does not the right hon. Gentleman stand against the grey man?

Mr. Heseltine: On the rare occasions that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) stands to say anything, he seeks to cause the maximum possible trouble for his party, which it claims has abandoned all the political views that the hon. Gentleman, at least, has the integrity still to advocate.

Mr. Skinner: Unlike the Secretary of State, I have never stood against the leader of my party. I was not one of those who decided to act as a stalking horse so that the Ken Barlow replica could get the job, turning out the previous Prime Minister like a dog in the night. The net result is that the right hon. Gentleman has finished up with the poll tax brief, which he did not want. He begged for the Chancellor of the Exchequer's job and was kicked into touch.

Mr. Heseltine: I am sorry to have bothered the hon. Gentleman. He should reconsider his position. By standing against the leader of the Labour party, he would cause exciting consequences for this country. If he were the leader of the Labour party, at least we would know that he was saying the things that most of his supporters still believe. We would know where we are and we would find it easier to keep the Labour party in opposition than we will otherwise. I do not want to trespass on your generosity, Mr. Speaker, by straying from the important revenue support grant debate.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Before my right hon. Friend tours the entire country from the Isle of Wight to Basildon, may I bring him back to the point that he was making? Whether we are dealing with metropolitan authorities or shire districts, Labour authorities set community charges that are substantially higher than in Conservative-controlled areas, and that is as true in the north as it is in London. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the low community charges set by Wandsworth and Westminster are proof of the generous revenue support grant settlements for all inner London boroughs, which are partly subsidised by the settlement for the shire districts represented by the Conservative party?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right. As I have made clear, we have provided an additional 7·2 per cent. cash to support local authority expenditure in the coming year when inflation is just over 4 per cent. That is a considerable real-terms improvement in the support for local authority services. It is characteristic that, despite the additional support from the Government, the overall level of charges in all classes of authority will be significantly higher in Labour-controlled authorities than in Conservative-controlled authorities. Interestingly, more money being spent is not the same as people getting a better standard of service.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): The right hon. Gentleman talked about a 4 per cent. uplift for all authorities next year. Would he care to tell us about Wolverhampton's predicament? We will have to take £15 million from our budget, cut hundreds of jobs and reduce services that have been built up patiently over many years. We have an uplift of 3·5 per cent. when inflation is 4 per cent. How can my authority balance its books and do what it should for the people of our town, when the Government are not granting it sufficient resources to maintain the level of services? How can you say that the people of Wolverhampton—*[Interruption.]* I shall finish, Mr. Speaker, because this is important for the people of Wolverhampton. They want to know why the Government are not supporting them. We have the——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must take his chance later in the debate.

Mr. Turner: The people of Wolverhampton will suffer as a result of the right hon. Gentleman's policies.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Turner: I apologise, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you so much.

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that the West Midlands police authority will receive an increase of about 15 per cent. in next year's allocation—that is an important concentration of support where people care most about the quality of service that they receive.

I was going to make the point that high community charges and high expenditure levels do not necessarily mean that the quality of service is high. That is clear from the analysis. Lambeth has one of the highest community charges in the country, but its cumulative rent arrears are now more than £17 million. That means that £17 million which should have been spent on maintaining the local authority housing stock is not being spent, because the local authority has not collected it. It is another example of inefficient management denying local authority tenants the service to which they are entitled.

Haringey's rent arrears are the equivalent of almost 20 per cent. of its rent roll——

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No.

All analyses show the same disregard for the quality of service, although the levels of expenditure are often very high. I have been less than impressed by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) during the past few days. He has been trying to suggest that one can make easy comparisons between one authority and another. He indulged in a very selective process and produced a number of statistics to try to show that some Labour authorities spend more than some Conservative-controlled authorities on some services.

That reflects only the fact that Labour controls some authorities where there are significant levels of need and the Government, through the standard spending assessment system, provide encouragement to meet that need. Therefore, it is not surprising that some Labour authorities spend more in areas of need.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heseltine: That is precisely what the Government intended should happen.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): What about meeting needs in North Derbyshire or South Derbyshire?

Mrs. Hicks: Is it not difficult for my right hon. Friend to come to the aid of Wolverhampton in the full knowledge that its authority has more than £5 million of rent arrears, numerous empty council houses and 10,000 surplus school places? Although we hear what the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) says, is it not a difficult situation for my right hon. Friend to comprehend?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend's point seems to be a most telling case, with which the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) should deal. It is very important, but it is perhaps not a debate which should be conducted over my head during my introductory speech.

I was intrigued to discover that the hon. Member for Dagenham alleges that the collection cost of 1 tonne of rubbish is £39·38 in Wandsworth and £16·62 in Haringey, but I understand from inquiries in Wandsworth that that figure is for collection and disposal—£30 per tonne for disposal alone under an old expensive contract inherited from the borough. The House will by now have guessed from where the authority inherited that contract—it was the old Labour-controlled Greater London council.

The most interesting point in the analysis by the hon. Member for Dagenham, in which he sought to produce figures to prove that Labour was more effective than others on an independent analysis, is why he does not therefore bring pressure to bear on Labour-controlled authorities, especially in London, which do not provide up-to-date returns on which their cost analysis can be compared. It is obvious that the hon. Member for Dagenham will not do anything to encourage Labour authorities to keep their returns up to date, so that their analysis of spending can be known to their electors and to a wider public. I can understand why. Those authorities are the ones which do not collect rents, which did not collect the rates and which do not collect the community charge.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Heseltine: I must confess that I understand that the hon. Gentleman is a non-payer of his community charge. I can see no case for a Secretary of State giving way to him when he advises his constituents that they should not maintain the law of this country.

Mr. Barnes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The statements made by the Secretary of State are absolutely incorrect. [HON. MEMBERS: "Apologise."] He should give me a chance to talk about North East Derbyshire. It is a Labour-controlled authority——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is this a point of order for me? If the hon. Gentleman is patient, he may get the chance to talk about North East Derbyshire later in the debate.

Mr. Heseltine: If the hon. Gentleman is now advising people to pay their community charge, I apologise unreservedly.

Mr. Harry Barnes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The Secretary of State has now given way to the hon. Gentleman. I would far rather that he put his question to the Secretary of State than to me.

Mr. Barnes: I never advised people not to pay their community charge. I might not have paid my own for a certain period, and there are strong arguments and analyses in connection with that, which I have explained in the House on numerous occasions. That chap over there knows nothing about them.

Mr. Heseltine: Do I understand that the hon. Gentleman's argument is that if he did not pay his own community charge—I believe that he said he would not do that-

Mr. Barnes: Rubbish.

Mr. Heseltine: Ah. Having said that he would not pay and having given the worst possible signals, under pressure he has now given way and changed his mind. It sounds to me like the worst possible deal.

Mr. Barnes: Will the Secretary of State explain why the standard spending assessment for North East Derbyshire places it 365th out of 366 authorities in England? It receives only £81 per head for poll tax payers in the area by way of grant, whereas other authorities receive two or three times that amount. If the right hon. Gentleman wants a discussion later about the principles of non-payment and why hon. Members may not have paid because of the damage done to the electoral register, that is another matter.

Will the right hon. Gentleman give an answer about the position of North East Derbyshire? It is not a well-heeled authority, yet it is at the bottom of the league in terms of the money that it is allowed to spend and the amount of grant that the Government provide.

Mr. Heseltine: I was trying to hear whether the hon. Gentleman paid his community charge because he was taken to court or whether it was because he was convinced that the case that he first advocated was wrong. He has not made that position clear to the House. The House would like to know whether the hon. Gentleman's sudden conversion to keeping within the law came because he changed his mind or because he was taken to court.

Mr. Barnes: The change occurred because there was a vast change in the Government's position. They decided to get rid of the poll tax, although they have not lived up to that promise properly and correctly. A change took place. The action taken by various people, including myself, advanced the position of the Secretary of State and led to the demise of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs.

[Mr. Barnes]

Thatcher) as Prime Minister. She was destroyed by the flagship of the poll tax. No one else on the Conservative Benches has produced arguments to explain why they wish to get rid of the poll tax and introduce a council tax in its place.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is being more than frank with the House. In effect, he is arguing that it is perfectly legitimate to defy the law as long as one gains by doing so. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that his is exactly the sort of case that led to authorities' inability to collect the community charge on the scale that was appropriate. It was a deliberate decision and strategy of some Labour Members that they would pursue that policy, and it does not lie in their mouths now to blame the Government for the effects of that deliberate strategy.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in Derbyshire, more than 90 per cent. of the money raised is spent by Derbyshire county council, which subsidises school meals at 1981 prices while sacking teachers, ending swimming lessons and closing libraries, which sends its leader and his cronies on an expensive trip to China while we have fewer police officers than 10 years ago, and which plays around with the pension fund? In those circumstances, is my right hon. Friend surprised that the leader of the council has just announced that he is to resign and that the deputy leader is facing charges? Does my right hon. Friend think that things will improve in future? With "friends" like the hon. Members for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), will they not remain exactly the same?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The debate has taken on a most intriguing dimension. Any minute now, the hon. Member for Dagenham will be on his feet asking for higher levels of public expenditure by local authorities. He will be citing—I have no doubt that he will paint a dramatic picture of harrowing cuts—the local authorities' case for an extra £2 billion, over and above the 7·2 per cent. increases that the Government believe to be appropriate.

The House will want to know exactly where the Labour party stands on the issue of increased public expenditure. It does not require a great deal of calculation to work out that, if the hon. Member for Dagenham argues the local authorities' case for an additional £2 billion of public expenditure—which is what the authorities want—that will have to be paid for somehow. The money will not come from extra support from the Government, so it can come only from either 1p extra on income tax or £60 on every poll tax bill. Before the debate ends, we shall want to know which argument the hon. Gentleman advances: does he support the levels of expenditure that the Government believe to be justified or would he put another 1p on income tax or £60 on poll tax to support the local authorities in their request for additional expenditure?

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Surely, as reports from the Audit Commission have repeatedly proven, the answer to everything is greater efficiency. That is why Wandsworth is able to return for a second year no community charge while receiving the lowest level of support of all the inner-London boroughs—hundreds of pounds less than the London borough of Lambeth next door.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises a central issue. The Labour party wants to get rid of the Audit Commission because, for the first time, the commission has put a spotlight on inefficiency in service delivery and on cost per unit of output in a way that is in the end likely to improve efficiency. The moment the Labour party sees genuine discipline imposed on local authorities, it wants to get rid of the agency that is achieving that discipline.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I despair of the Secretary of State ever treating local government matters in the House seriously. He reduces everything to drag-out dirty politics, as though he was addressing the Conservative conference.

The right hon. Gentleman is looking around for reasons why local authorities will be asking for extra money. I put it to him that, in the case of the London borough of Newham, it will be because we have to find £6 million this year out of revenue as a result of decisions taken by the valuation court on old rate rebates. That had nothing to do with the London borough of Newham. We are not the only borough in London—or, indeed, elsewhere—facing that prospect. What help can the Secretary of State offer us? Or does he intend to carry on kicking the thing around like a cheap party political football?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that he went to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities yesterday and that they had a discussion about the matter. It would be quite wrong for me to anticipate what my hon. Friend might recommend by way of response. Frankly, when the hon. Gentleman uses that sort of debasing language—I have to use those words—to misrepresent the courteous reception that he received yesterday at the Department of the Environment, he does not encourage my hon. Friend the Minister of State to continue to see people so courteously.

The hon. Member for Dagenham has also been misleading the public about the target community charge for next year. All hon. Members know that the figure that we produced in the settlement provides for standard spending of just over £257. That is not a prediction; it is a target. Efficient authorities will be able to set charges at or near that level, and a significant number of authorities will do precisely that. However, inefficient local authorities will charge more. It is interesting to note that, once again, 18 of the 20 highest community charges this year have been set by Labour local authorities.

The latest evidence is that the gloomy predictions about collection rates that were made by the hon. Member for Dagenham and his colleagues are not being realised. Returns for the third quarter of 1991-92 show that 29 per cent. of the annual budgeted income was collected in that quarter, making a total of 68 per cent. of the budgeted yield for the year. The figure for that quarter is marginally better than for the same quarter in the previous year. There is no reason why, in the year as a whole, local authorities should not improve their overall level of collection. Indeed, the latest figures for 1990-91 show that authorities have now collected 97 per cent. of the budgeted income for that year. As always, however, the average disguises the failure of the worst authorities—and the worst authorities are Labour authorities. As far as we can see on the latest information, in about nine cases a quarter or more of last year's budgeted income still remains to be collected. I hope that that position will have improved, but that is the latest information available to me.

The essence of the point that I wish to stress to the House is that that problem is not unique to the community charge. The self-same authorities generally had the worst record for rent collection also. They would do no better under "fair rates" proposals of the hon. Member for Dagenham , if they were ever to be introduced. Indeed, they are the same authorities that cannot collect their rents either. One keeps coming back to the same authorities—Lambeth, Haringey, Hackney and Liverpool. Time and again, the same authorities do not collect their bills—whatever those bill happen to be.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): May I take my right hon. Friend briefly back to the figure of £257 that he quoted? I believe that, if it put its mind to it, my authority in Nottingham could achieve that figure —but with one exception. Will my right hon. Friend address the problem that affected all my constituents last year when an extra £44·75 was imposed on them to pay for the slow payers and non-payers who were encouraged in their actions by the Labour Members, and especially by Labour Members such as the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes)? I make that point because the neighbouring authority to the city of Nottingham, Conservative-controlled Gedling, imposed only an extra £3·50. That shows clearly that the surcharge had nothing to do with Government legislation but was due entirely to the difference between Conservative and Labour-run authorities. What protection can we give our constituents?

Mr. Heseltine: The simplest solution, as I am sure my hon. Friend will persistently advocate, is to vote those Labour authorities out of office. That is incomparably the best way in which to deal with the issue.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: Please forgive me, but I shall not give way because many other hon. Members wish to speak.

I wish to say a few words about non-payment. The House has heard me say before, and I repeat it now, that there will be no amnesty for non-payers. We are taking further steps to ensure that authorities have the necessary powers for the proper enforcement of the community charge. On 23 January, I announced that we would be extending from two to six years the period during which enforcement proceedings may be commenced. I announced last week that we are moving swiftly to put beyond doubt the admissibility of computer evidence in proceedings for community charge recovery in magistrates courts. We will table amendments to the Local Government Finance Bill, now in another place, to ensure that admissibility.

Last week, the hon. Member for Dagenham put it to me that we should put a short Bill through the House in rapid time to deal with the issue. I considered that offer with fairness and in deference to his position of responsibility as a leading member of the Labour party. When his letter arrived, I spent a great deal of the day exploring all the problems of putting through a Bill of the sort that he had in mind. He could not, for example, carry all the House with him. There could easily have been filibustering by the Scottish nationalists or who knows what. He could not command a majority in another place and I had to take those issues into account, but I did not dismiss the possibility out of hand.

I was beginning to talk to the business managers about moving in that direction, which could have saved a fortnight of the House's time and would have been possible in the best of all possible worlds. However, I came to the House to find that a principal piece of Government legislation, the Education (Schools) Bill was being subjected to a filibuster. As a consequence, we lost a day's business.

That displays, as clearly as one can, the cynical disregard the Labour party has for proper relations between the Opposition and the Government. They had no intention of enabling us to get our legislative programme through with dispatch. It was done to try to cover up the embarrassment of the Labour party at the refusal of its own members to try to collect the community charge. Therefore, I was not prepared to deal with the matter in the way that the hon. Member for Dagenham suggested.

My Department has written to local authorities about how to proceed in the short period before the Bill which we are amending is enacted and about the position of existing liability orders. In the intervening period, authorities will wish to consult the clerks to the justices about how to proceed. We believe there is no obstacle to authorities continuing to apply for liability orders where they consider that their procedures for the presentation of cases meet the requirements of existing law. I understand that a number of authorities are continuing to do so.

In any event, it is our view that summonses for non-payment of the community charge, with return dates after new powers are in place, can continue to be issued. When cases have been or are adjourned, they can be considered under the new powers when they are in place. Our proposed amendments will not be retrospective, but they will apply in proceedings to enforce payment of the community charge whenever the liability arose, including cases in which a summons was issued before the Local Government Finance Bill takes effect.

Our understanding in relation to liability orders, which have been made under existing powers, is as follows. The new provisions will not in themselves invalidate any order previously made. Local authorities can continue to act on orders which magistrates courts have granted. An individual may of course apply to challenge a liability order in a higher court—for instance, by applying for leave to seek judicial review if the order was granted within the past three months. Each case would need to be looked at separately on its merits. If the only ground on which an individual sought relief was the inadmissibility of computer evidence, and he had not raised the issue in a lower court, it seems unlikely that the court, in the exercise of its discretion, would entertain an application.

I understand that, if it came to a hearing, it is equally unlikely that the court, in the exercise of its discretion, would quash a liability order solely on the grounds of procedural defect if no injustice had been done and the community charge remained unpaid. Let us be clear; we would be dealing with individuals who have failed to pay a community charge properly due and who would be seeking to avoid or delay payment through a technicality.

[Mr. Heseltine]

I hope that hon. Members will believe that, in addressing the legitimate interests of the crucial services provided by local government for the forthcoming year, and having regard to the current levels of inflation and the ability of the Government to afford whatever sum is appropriate, this settlement is one for which they can vote. We believe that it is coupled with a realistic capping regime to contain excessive levels of expenditure. The House will know of the regime that follows the determination by any authority that its budget comes within that capping regime.

The House would do well to support this set of proposals, which I commend. In so doing, it would urge local authorities not to seek to justify higher levels of expenditure, which can only put pressure on their community charge payers and others in the area affected by such charges, but to seek improvements in the output values that they can attain, which are being attained by many authorities of all political persuasions up and down the country.

The settlement that we are finalising today reflects the Government's continuing commitment to ensuring a proper level of funding for local authority expenditure. It provides sufficient resources for local authorities to provide a full range of services at a price that both their charge payers and the country as a whole can afford.

4.10 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): This debate brings us to wearisomely familiar territory, even if our only guide to that territory so far has been a typically rambling and shambling speech from the Secretary of State. It is territory littered with the wrecks of failed Government policies. It is a familiar catalogue of Government mistakes, which have dogged local government for more than a decade, undermined its morale, slashed its resources and virtually extinguished its independence.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman must be joking.

Last year the Secretary of State had an excuse of sorts. The more generous among us were inclined to say that, in the decade since his first stint at Marsham street, he appeared to have mellowed somewhat. While others pointed the accusing finger at him as the progenitor of the "Whitehall knows best" approach, we tended to point to his attack on the poll tax—the "Tory tax", as I think he called it—and to his robust opposition to universal capping. Even his commitment, at this time last year, to a manifestly inadequate RSG settlement could be excused on the ground that he had inherited the settlement from his predecessor and had had no chance to recast it. A year later, none of those excuses will wash any more.

This revenue support grant settlement is the Secretary of State's settlement; the poll tax bills are his poll tax bills; the capping is his capping; the consequences for local government, disastrous as they are, are consequences that he has willed as a deliberate act of policy. The great centraliser of the early 1980s, the great hostile opponent of the whole concept of local government, is again alive and well in Marsham street. It is little wonder, therefore, that we heard only the merest token of any analysis or defence of the RSG settlement. The Secretary of State spent the bulk of his speech on a typically wild assault and denunciation of local government in general.

So it is that this RSG settlement shows all the flaws of its predecessors. It is, first of all, simply inadequate. It represents a full £2 billion less than local authorities—I refer not only to Labour authorities but to all local authority associations, including those under Tory control —calculated were needed to maintain services, to take account of inflation and to discharge the new obligations imposed by statute.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman very shortly.

Mrs. Mahon: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gould: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, too.

To justify the settlement, the Government persist in using figures based on calculations that are irrelevant and misleading. They point to a rate of increase over last year's settlement, when everyone knows that last year's settlement was itself inadequate, that the actual level of local government expenditure was much higher.

They base themselves on a rate of inflation of 4·5 per cent., which is lower than the 7·3 per cent. which local government calculates it actually has to face and which is higher than the general rate because of the importance of wage settlements beyond the control of local government.

They fail to take account of demographic changes, of new service pressures, of the impact of recession or of the rise in homelessness. No wonder local government as a whole regards this RSG settlement as unsatisfactory.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman shortly, but I give priority to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Mrs. Mahon: Probably because the Secretary of State anticipated the question that I wanted to ask him, he refused to give way to me.

Labour-controlled Calderdale, recently named the second most efficient metropolitan council, has recently given official figures for the loss of rate support grant since 1979. More than £167 million has been lost as a result of RSG cuts under the Conservatives. That represents £13 million a year for each of the 13 unlucky years that the Conservatives have been in office. That is why the area is facing another massive round of cuts, which leaves it unable to build homes for the homeless and explains why we have crumbling schools and face the prospect of the closure of old people's homes. That has nothing to do with councillors but everything to do with the Conservatives removing £13 million a year in RSG in the way I have described.

Mr. Gould: The testimony of my hon. Friend is persuasive because what she tells us about the experience of Calderdale, important and damaging though that has been, is by no means limited to that authority, to Labour local authorities or to local authorities of particular categories. It has been the general experience of local government as a whole, and Conservative-controlled local authorities are almost as damning in their judgment of Conservative treatment of local government as are my hon. Friends and I.

Mr. Oppenheim: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I understand his commitment to positive discrimination in giving way first to the hon. Lady the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

If the settlement is really so inadequate, may I ask the hon. Gentleman to give the House an unequivocal commitment significantly to increase funding for local government within two years? Yes or no?

Mr. Gould: I will gladly give the hon. Gentleman a commitment that we shall put an end to the £25 million of taxpayers' money wasted every day on maintaining the poll tax in being. That must be added to the £14 billion of taxpayers' money so far thrown at the poll tax. It is the most breathtaking cheek on the part of the Conservative Members to pretend that, in some way, they are the guardians of prudent management of the taxpayers' money—*[Interruption.]* This deliberate self-delusion as to the true value of the RSG settlement may convince those who want to be misled, but it cannot alter the real consequences in the real world of reduced services and higher poll tax bills.

The size of the settlement is not the only problem. There is also the question of the distribution of the grant and the whole system of standard spending assessments, a system which even the Secretary of State's predecessor admitted was flawed and needed reform but which has remained unreformed and consequently open to fundamental objection.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Is the £4·2 billion of additional public expenditure that the hon. Gentleman is recommending within the £37 billion already promised, or is it a new and separate promise?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman must have been asleep at the time of the Budget and Finance Bill last year, when the House appoved that expenditure because it at least made some attempt to redress the short-changing of local government over a long period under the Conservatives.

I was speaking of the flaws of the standard spending assessments. Virtually no one has a good word to say for SSAs. Even the Audit Commission warned that the Government should not underestimate the lack of confidence in SSAs among local government politicians and professions.

Everyone knows that SSAs measure the wrong things. Why, for example, are needs measured but not resources, and why is this done in an arbitrary, capricious and over-complicated way? Why is it assumed that it costs £1,148 per adult to deliver a standard level of service in Manchester, but only £857 for the same standard level of service in Wigan? Why is it assumed that a 300-pupil secondary school in Sheffield needs £300,000 less than a similar school in Wandsworth?

Why does Barnsley, with all the problems of a declining mining area, receive an SSA ranking it 251st out of 366 English authorities—below that of such supposedly deprived areas as Epsom, Sevenoaks and Bath? Why are so many well-run Labour authorities in the north—Wigan, Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, and so on—victims of the capping axe on the basis of a manifestly inappropriate set of SSAs? Do Ministers dispute in public what they have admitted in private—that the SSA system discriminates against those authorities?

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): My hon. Friend has referred to Barnsley, which is 36th out of 36 metropolitan districts. What is his view of a settlement that puts Manchester's SSA 78 per cent. higher than Barnsley's for the provision of a standard level of service?

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend chooses one more of a veritable myriad statistics which could be adduced. There is a huge range of statistics which show how ludicrous and irrational is the system of SSAs. I pointed out on 26 November that there must be something wrong with a system which concluded that Harrow, with 15·4 days of snow each year, had more snow than Cumbria, with only 12·6 days. At least that nonsense, we understand, has been partially remedied, with two days added to Cumbria's total. But that is only one of the many inconsistencies.

Can either the Secretary of State or the Minister tell us how many local authorities—is it dozens or is it scores?—have been so concerned about their treatment that they have been to see them to try to get their assessments changed?

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): I agree with some of the hon. Gentleman's comments about the standard spending assessment; he has made many points which I believe many Conservatives throughout the country would make. Nevertheless, will he find time this afternoon to spell out some of the alternatives which the Labour party might think it could find to improve the situation?

Mr. Gould: We are at least making some progress. I very much welcome the spirit in which the hon. Gentleman not only concedes that there is common ground between us in the criticisms that I am making of the SSAs, but also demonstrated a willingness to learn from the excellent policies that we have published. I will gladly send him a set of the policy documents, which I am glad to say are in great demand by letter writers from all over the country.

It is not just the capricious nature of the system that is unacceptable; it is, I am sorry to say, the scope which the system offers to an unscrupulous Secretary of State to manipulate it for party advantage. It is not just the introduction of criteria, such as foreign visitor nights, which are plainly calculated to benefit Westminster; it is the pattern of the increase in SSAs, with a plain divergence along party lines, that gives real cause for concern. The figures are quite startling in their implications.

For local government in England as a whole, SSAs increased by 21·6 per cent. more for Tory-controlled authorities than for Labour-controlled councils. The figure for shire districts, where the comparison is least affected by differences in the nature of the authorities, is even clearer. The SSA for Tory authorities increased by 24·6 per cent. more than for Labour authorities and the same pattern is found for counties. The only exceptions are metropolitan authorities, where the comparison is impossible because there is only one Tory metropolitan authority, and London, where the rate of increase shows little variation according to political control.

Mr. Heseltine: The House may wish to know that the average SSA for every class of Labour-controlled authority is higher than it is for Conservative-controlled

[Mr. Heseltine]

authorities. The hon. Gentleman is talking about shire districts. Labour-controlled authorities have SSAs which, per adult, are 27 per cent. higher than the average for Conservative districts.

Mr. Gould: The Secretary of State uses a statistic that simply shows that need tends to be greater in inner-city areas served by Labour local authorities, as he pointed out earlier this afternoon. Significantly, he did not deal with the figure that I presented to him. We are not discussing the absolute level of SSAs. The charge that I level against him is that, between the current and the coming financial year, he has sanctioned an increase in SSAs that is nearly 25 per cent. faster for Tory authorities than for Labour authorities.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: I shall give way in a moment, once I have concluded this point.

The pattern revealed by those figures is too consistent and unmistakable to be accidental. The contrast is sometimes breathtaking.

Mr. Heseltine: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: The Secretary of State wants a second bite at defending his indefensible position.

Mr. Heseltine: That allegation amazed me when the hon. Gentleman first uttered it, so I looked up the figures. The most startling discovery was that one of the largest improvements was made in the neighbouring constituency to mine—Labour-controlled Oxford, East—and one of the lowest improvements was made in my district authority.

Mr. Gould: I am delighted that I have at least induced the Secretary of State to look at the figures. I am prepared to concede that the figures that he has just quoted are exactly accurate. However, although that is the second time that he has come to the Dispatch Box allegedly to deal with the point, he has still not denied the basic charge that we level against him.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No, I am sorry, but I wish to complete the point before I give way.

Sir Anthony Grant *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I have not yet made the point, so the hon. Gentleman will perhaps sit down and listen to it for a change.

The conclusion must be that the Secretary of State has found a way, in election year, of providing an advantage to authorities of the right political colour. After all, we are operating in a highly charged, pre-election context and we are dealing with a Secretary of State who is, above all, a ruthless and unprincipled party politician. He could not tell someone the time without warning him that, under Labour, every hour would be reduced to 58 minutes. But even for him, it is a piece of breathtaking cheek that he should seek to link the Labour party with high local government taxation.

What brought lawful citizens on to the streets? What induced Tory councillors to resign? What forced £14 billion-worth of taxpayers' expenditure to be thrown at it? What destroyed the former leader of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)? It was the poll tax. The poll tax forced up bills and was one of the most painful aspects of the Government's already pathetic record on personal taxation.

Mr. Heseltine: I suppose that all Members of Parliament are used to being accused of party political chicanery. What worries me is the hon. Gentleman's assault on my competence. He suggests that I have somehow tried to fix the revenue support grant to help the Conservative party. Again, my further inquiries into the matter, in which I am supposed to have been working for the benefit of the Tory party, show that I managed to arrange a situation in which the SSA for Barking and Dagenham is higher than the average for all the Conservative-controlled outer London boroughs.

Mr. Gould: I am glad to say that that is yet one further reason why no doubt I will be returned with an increased majority. Again, for the third time, the Secretary of State comes to the Dispatch Box and makes another irrelevant point, but he does not deal with the central charge, which remains on the table.

Sir Anthony Grant: I want to take up the hon. Gentleman on the point which he made about the shires. He said that my right hon. Friend has been generous to the shires. Cambridgeshire is the one part which I know; the hon. Gentleman knows Cambridgeshire too, because he has been gadding about there quite a lot. Will he explain why, for months on end, the Labour and Liberal parties in Cambridgeshire have been bellyaching about the skinflint nature of my right hon. Friend? What does the hon. Gentleman say about that?

Mr. Gould: With every intention of being well meaning, the hon. Gentleman misunderstood the point that I was making. I was not saying that the Secretary of State had deliberately favoured shire districts. Let me reiterate the point. What I said was that, as between Labour-controlled shire districts and Tory-controlled shire districts, the increase in SSAs was 24·6 per cent. higher in the case of Tory-controlled authorities. We may have made a little progress and got that point across to the hon. Gentleman.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Gould: When I am confronted with a barrage of intending interveners, I am less likely to give way.

The significance of the SSA is that it determines the level of grant and therefore the size of the poll tax bill. It is also the basis for applying the cap on spending which will determine the cuts in services which will have to be made by each local authority. That is why the intricacies of the SSA system, which may seem arcane and remote from the concerns of most voters, are of great importance to those self-same voters.

The minds of voters will be concentrated wonderfully on local government finance by the arrival of poll tax bills at the beginning of April. We expect that the Secretary of State will try everything he can to shuffle off the blame for those high poll tax bills on to the local authorities, but we also know that the voters, by a huge majority, will agree with the Secretary of State in viewing the poll tax as a Tory tax.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East) *rose*——

Mr. Gould: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I ought to give notice that I do not intend to deliver the same unstructured mess of a speech as the Secretary of State.

Mr. Paice: I wanted to take up the hon. Gentleman on precisely the point about poll tax bills. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), the hon. Gentleman said that, if elected to office, he would immediately do away with what I think he referred to as the £25 million a day waste of the poll tax. Bearing in mind that the House has already passed the legislation to abolish the poll tax, and bearing in mind also that the poll tax bills will have gone out and that the financial year will probably have started by the time the general election takes place, is the hon. Gentleman saying that at that stage, with 10 or 11 months of the financial year and the poll tax still to run, he would abolish the poll tax? If so, will he tell the House how he would finance local government for the remaining months?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman's intervention simply shows how right we and most people are to regret the fact that the opportunity which the Government had to abolish the poll tax for this April was thrown away. I might add that that opportunity was aided by our offer of co-operation on the legislation required to do it, but that offer was turned down.

Many authorities, of whatever political control, will have to make substantial cuts to stay within the cap. That is the consequence of the universal capping which the Secretary of State now supports, in direct contradiction to his earlier and principled opposition to it. Many authorities which have hitherto escaped the threat of capping because their budgets fell below the £15 million threshold will be caught. No one should imagine that councils such as Derwentside or Elmbridge can make the huge cuts in their budgets now demanded of them without great damage being done to services.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the major reasons that Derwentside's standard spending assessment is so far beyond the needs of that authority is the direct action of the Government in closing the Consett steelworks 10 years ago, which resulted in the local authority working to enable some industrial activity to continue? The chairman of the Tory party continues to say how well Consett is doing. He may like to know that male unemployment in the town is now about 20 per cent., and without the support of local government, the prospects of the town and its surrounding district are exceptionally bleak.

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend speaks eloquently about the problems of a local authority that is the victim of the combination of capping and inappropriate SSAs in relation to the district's basic economic problems.

The significance of the SSA lies in its implications for the poll tax levels. The poll tax is a sort of residuum: the poll tax payer picks up the bill for whatever expenditure is not covered by another source of income. If central Government grant is set too low, the poll tax must rise. That has happened consistently throughout the short, unhappy history of the poll tax.

It was originally projected that the poll tax bills would be relatively low, but then the ideologues took charge. The great virtue of the poll tax was always said to be that it would increase accountability. Its impact was deliberately increased by cutting other sources of finance and loading the burden of any further spending on the hapless poll tax payer—the familiar problem of gearing.

Last year, even Ministers took fright at what they had done. They suddenly reversed gear and raised value added tax by 2·5p—a 16·6 per cent. increase—in order to reduce poll tax bills. However, Ministers have still not learnt the lesson that, if they short-change local government by way of grant, the inevitable consequence is higher poll tax bills.

Ministers have now taken such a grip on all aspects of local government finance that they can no longer escape the blame when things go wrong. The Secretary of State decides the amount of grant, central Government set the level of the business rate—and we have heard again today how damaging that has been for businesses, particularly small ones. The Secretary of State for Education and Science decides teachers' pay. The Home Secretary sets the pay for the police and firefighters. Through his capping powers, the Secretary of State for the Environment fixes the size of every authority's budget. As a result, every one of the 38 million poll tax bills to arrive in March and April will bear the fingerprints of the Secretary of State.

That proposition becomes even more apparent when one considers the size of the bill. The Government have already abandoned their prediction—they said so again today—that the average bill would be £257. Even Ministers seem to concede that their record on the issue is so lamentable and lacking in credibility that it is preferable to admit error early. It now seems inevitable that the bills will be closer to £300 on average than the Government's previous over-optimistic figure.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): It is even worse than that —*[Interruption.]* I have been present, and I shall not take a crack like that from a Conservative Member.

A coal mine contributes towards a local authority's affairs. The recent Rothschild report suggested that there would be hardly any pits left in Nottinghamshire. My constituency will probably lose many pits, which will mean that the local authority will lose a lot of money. Where will the money come from to provide the necessary services? It seems incredible that the Nottinghamshire Tory Members supported the Government's policy on pit closures.

Mr. Gould: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. One of the most regrettable and astonishing aspects of the poll tax fiasco is that Tory Members have been so disloyal to the local authorities that have been lumbered with the problems of dealing with the tax and its associated effects. I cannot help but think that local communities will know what action to take when they get the chance to ascribe the blame.

The Government have no one but themselves to blame for poll tax bills that seem likely to lose them the general election. The study by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy published last week suggested that bills in England would include a non-collection surcharge of, on average, £21—sadly, even that figure seems likely to be an underestimate.

[Mr. Gould]

Those problems could have been avoided if the Government had abolished the poll tax immediately instead of taking the Walter Mitty view that the wish was as good as the deed. Presumably, when the Secretary of State announced last year that the poll tax would go, he never thought that he would be held to account for that promise before a general election. As it is, local authorities face all the difficulties of collecting what the Prime Minister has described as a "virtually uncollectable" tax. Not only will the Prime Minister's assurance in October that the Government had "abolished the poll tax" be ringing in people's ears, but there will be two additional Government-created handicaps.

First, the 20 per cent. contribution rule remains in force, even though the Government have conceded the principle that it can no longer be supported. That rule means that local councils have to continue to try to squeeze blood out of stones while trying to collect the poll tax from people with literally no income. Even the Audit Commission found that the tax cost £15 in administration for every £6 of net revenue it raised. The problem is much worse in inner-city districts, where the Audit Commission found that up to 60 per cent. of the entries on a poll tax register were likely to change in the course of one year.

The second handicap is even more bizarre. The Labour party and local government in general have warned for some months that there is a legal difficulty in persuading magistrates courts to accept computer records as evidence. The Government, who were responsible for the oversight in the first place, have been remarkably complacent in dealing with the problem. Even now that they have been persuaded that action is needed, they propose a change that will take six weeks to have any effect. That is simply not good enough. It is hard to fathom what the Secretary of State is playing at, and even harder when he writes to me saying that he was prepared to consider a short Bill, but abandoned the idea because the passage of the schools legislation was delayed. That almost beggars belief. Either there is a need for a short Bill or there is not.

The Secretary of State is responsible for the poll tax mess and for getting local authorities out of it. It is his duty to act to resolve the problem, not to make silly party points while local authorities are forced to mark time and poll tax defaulters get a six-week holiday.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): The metropolitan borough of Wigan, represented by myself and my hon. Friends the Members for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe), contains three completely different situations. The magistrates in Leigh refuse to deal with the council's applications, Wigan magistrates courts implement them and in my constituency, Makerfield, the magistrates adjourn them. Local authorities have to attend court each day and, depending on which magistrates are in court, they may or may not be able to make an order. This is a shambles, which the Government know about and about which they do nothing.

Mr. Gould: I gladly adopt my hon. Friend's word: the position is a shambles. No local authority can be assured that it can successfully pursue poll tax defaulters in the courts. The Labour party's offer of co-operation on a short Bill still stands, and if the Government wish to plug the loophole they can do so in just one day. If the Government still ignore that offer, local government and poll tax payers will know who is to blame for the bills that will have to increase still further as defaulters are again let off the hook by this lazy and incompetent Government.

True to form, local government will be left by the Government to clear up the mess. They have already had to issue 10·5 million summonses—the biggest debt collection exercise in the history of the world. Local government has at least £1·5 billion of poll tax still outstanding. The Government do nothing to help, but make matters worse by their intransigence and stupidity. The Government have given up on local government. They have given up any hope of remedying their terrible mistakes. They have given up the intention of doing anything but hang on by their fingertips until a general election puts them out of their misery. When that finally happens, the loudest cheers will come from poll tax payers and local government as a whole.

4.49 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): For just over an hour, the House has been entertained by highly contentious exchanges between occupants of the Government and Opposition Front Benches, but I confess that my contribution will be extremely limited and considerably less exciting. I have no doubt that the moment I resume my seat, normal hostilities will be resumed.

I refer to the point made by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) concerning the standard spending assessment and the difficulties that that system is encountering. Even in these somewhat excitable circumstances, the House ought to reflect on that aspect fairly calmly. Whatever may be the outcome of the general election that confronts us, it is clear that the future pattern of local government will again be disturbed.

There is no prospect of continuity. Nothing is more depressingly certain than a continuation of the provisional. Therefore, the SSA will be with us for quite a while. I see no prospect of root-and-branch reform, which makes all the more necessary detailed consideration of the system's application and a preparedness to make adjustments where it is manifestly inequitable in its operation.

I have in mind in that respect the experience of the county of Shropshire in the recent past. Under the measure that we are debating this afternoon, Shropshire's SSA will increase by 5·9 per cent.—the fifth lowest figure for shire counties. In the previous year, Shropshire had the lowest increase. I do not believe that anyone making a reasonably detached judgment of local authority affairs in Shropshire would conclude that it is a profligate county council, but on the SSA arithmetic, it is faced with a number of stark options that naturally fall predominantly on the educational sector of the council's spending.

One of the options that it demonstrated was to use its SSA resources to meet statutory but not non-statutory educational obligations—which of course meant the loss of nursery education in the county. Naturally and understandably, that brought a sharp reaction. I do not believe that anyone involved in the campaign which that decision prompted considered that there was any party political dimension to it. I say that because, in recent weeks, I have been associated with others of my hon. Friends representing Shropshire constituencies and with councillors across the political divide.

The county council resolved to use £4·6 million from its reserves to ensure that nursery education as currently conducted can be maintained for the year in prospect. In my view, that decision was wholly justifiable, although no one can relish the running down of balances on that scale. Above all, no one can have any faith in the certainty of nursery education in the county, knowing that there is no prospect of running down balances on that scale for another year.

I return to the question of how SSAs will be calculated in future and the way in which the methodology can be applied in respect of nursery education in a county that has to meet the needs of sparsely populated rural communities. I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to take account of the difficulties created by the current year's SSA settlement; to take note of the considerable gesture represented by the running down of the county's balances; to show proper sympathy with the problems that exist; and to ensure that, when next year's settlement is considered, the sword of Damocles will not be held over the future of nursery education in Shropshire. The county council's behaviour has been exemplary, and I do not believe that it is the canons of good government that such a threat should exist.

4.54 pm

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): Over the past three years, we have attempted to put before Secretaries of State and Ministers the special financial plight confronting the metropolitan borough of Wigan. Recently, we had extended to us the courtesy of an all-party delegation being received in the very best spirit by the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities and his staff. Its members placed before him the books, as it were, of the metropolitan borough of Wigan, of which my constituency is a part.

For three years, before any rate was fixed, or any capping criteria were set, we systematically placed before the Minister for his consideration and that of his staff a request to be advised how best Wigan could achieve maximum efficiency, value for money, good housekeeping, and everything else that speaks well of local government services.

That gesture was accepted by the Minister to the extent that he sent one of his civil servants to Wigan for several months to examine its books. Even the Minister himself concedes that authority's excellent quality of services and first-class housekeeping. However, when I put questions to the Minister, he says that that is not relevant to the standard spending assessment formula. What on earth are we supposed to do in such a case, which has been examined by the Audit Commission and by *The Sunday Times*, whose league table showed Wigan to be the third most efficient metropolitan district in the country?

Referring to the district's value-for-money educational services, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities states in the parliamentary brief sent to all right hon. and hon. Members that the teachers' pay award will have implications:

> "Teacher jobs will have to be sacrificed to meet capping criteria. The Government claims that it wishes to improve standards and hails the SAT 7-year-old test results as a move in this direction. Yet Wigan, which produced above-average results, is being forced to consider reducing its teaching staff."

Impartial assessments by two highly professional organisations clearly state that that metropolitan district is again being discriminated against under a system that militates against good housekeeping and accountability.

When the poll tax was first introduced, I understood that it was about ensuring greater accountability to ratepayers, Parliament, and Ministers. The bit about accountability to Ministers may well be true. It appears to be their exclusive preserve, regardless of the case that authorities may present, to ordain that an unfair, unworkable and discriminatory formula must remain the norm.

Since the introduction of standard spending assessments, my borough has been capped three times. In the past three years, £38 million has been taken from its budget. An all-party delegation, including the leaders of the Conservative and Liberal groups and the chairman of the chamber of commerce, presented the case to the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities recently, but no financial relief has yet been received. We now face a further deficit of £15 million to meet the capping criteria. It is estimated—again, the position has been examined by a Minister—that between 750 and 1,000 redundancies will follow.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): In local government?

Mr. Cunliffe: Yes, in local government.

Only last week, 625 miners lost their jobs at the Bickershaw colliery, and the week before, 220 people were made redundant at a textile mill. The borough is already involved in a grim economic scenario, and needs all the help and encouragement that it can get.

What will the proposed cuts mean? A minimum of about 400 teachers will lose their jobs somewhere along the line; social services will be decimated; 25 or 30 youth officers will suffer. The aged, the sick, the chronically disabled, the young and the unemployed will all be affected by this stupid SSA.

My Tory opponent in Leigh has said that he will fight the next election on home rule and the breaking up of Wigan metro—a unitary authority, which has built in the new local government criteria. I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not present. According to an item in the *Leigh Reporter*, Mr. Egerton—the Conservative candidate—has spoken to the Secretary of State, and has approached various other people. He says that he has special access to the right hon. Gentleman's advisers, and that the intention is to restore Leigh's status as a non-county borough and to make Atherton, Tyldesley and Hindley into urban district councils.

Perhaps the Minister will confirm or deny that that is the plan. It entirely contradicts the criteria laid down for local government, including the elimination of two-tier authorities. It is, of course, understandable that a Conservative candidate will need a little help when the Labour majority is 17,000.

The Government claim that the SSAs are scientifically calculated, and represent a real measure of the need to spend. The Minister is still the patron saint of the original poll tax—as opposed to the new Whitehall council tax—and I saw him on television the other day making such claims.

[Mr. Cunliffe]

Is it not true that all the professional associations in local government—bodies that did not involve themselves in the political debate until this corny formula came into effect—have condemned the system? It has militated against the lives of local people—against their trades, their associations, their business acumen and, above all, their employment prospects. It has been proved to be unfair, unworkable, discriminatory and indefensible; it has been utterly discredited.

If this is an example of the new Tory "charterism", heaven help the nation. The sooner the Government have the guts to grant the country sweet relief, the sooner we can provide hope and consolation. Under a Labour Government, the SSA formula will be destined for the dustbin, along with its architects, the Tory legislators.

5.5 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I was intrigued by the fact that the hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) devoted so much time to the utterances of his Conservative opponent. I should have thought that, with a majority of 17,000, he would not be all that worried, but perhaps his anxiety is an indication of the impact that the Tory candidate is making. I am less worried, as Labour would have to gain 22,000-odd extra votes in my constituency. One never knows, however; the electorate might change their minds.

Let me say a word about the tone of today's debate.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): One word: rubbish.

Mr. Hughes: As the hon. Gentleman has not yet spoken, it is not entirely rubbish.

It has been the case during my time in local government and since then—and I suspect that it has always been the case—that every local authority grant settlement has been greeted with the chorus, "It is not enough." It is inconceivable that after the Secretary of State had announced the amount that would be available, an authority would ever say, "Thank you very much; that is exactly what we were looking for." That certainly did not happen under the last Labour Government.

Mr. Allen McKay: The hon. Gentleman is not comparing like with like. In the days of the rates, before the poll tax regime was introduced, local authorities would complain to the Secretary of State that they had not enough money, irrespective of which party was in government. Then, however, they were allowed to collect the extra money that they needed after going to the people to ask them for it.

Mr. Hughes: I was living in the London borough of Ealing when it put up its rates by 57 per cent. The borough was allowed to collect the money all right, and I remember who it collected it from.

I was a member of Hounslow borough council, which was then Labour-controlled, under a Labour Government. The borough complained then that it did not have enough grant. The complaints of Opposition Members should be put into context. We should bear it in mind that many local government leaders—members of different parties and different local authority associations—will be saying, partly as a way of bargaining and protecting their position, that they would like more money.

Of course my own borough, the London borough of Harrow, could use more money. School rolls are rising and our first schools are crammed. There are no empty places in them, as there are in other local authority areas. My local authority is financing one first and middle school, and seeking to finance a second.

I know that eventually the money comes back, but it has to be financed in the short term. There is also the problem of the rapid increase in the Metropolitan police precept. Of course we want more money to be spent on policing, but that money has to be added to the community charge bills of people in my constituency and elsewhere. In Harrow, people would like more money, but they recognise that they cannot just have more money without paying the price for it.

The standard spending assessments have increased by 6·8 per cent.—that is above the level of inflation. It is important to recognise that it should be possible for each local authority to be able to spend at least what it spent last year, plus inflation, without making any cuts in services. Surely, the art of government, as the noble Lord Wilson said when he was Prime Minister, is summed up in the phrase:

> "Politics is the art of the possible,"

Sir Anthony Grant: It was the late Lord Butler who used that phrase.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who used to represent part of my constituency. I thought that it was a wise phrase to have been used by the noble Lord Wilson.

Anyone in government, whether local or national, must choose priorities. If money is spent in one area, it robs money from another. Money given to local authorities used to be given in watertight compartments and if it was not spent in one area, it could not be transferred straight across to another. That has changed under this Government. There is greater flexibility for virement under the budget headings. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) may not have had experience in local government. I am talking with direct experience of local government during the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that for three years I was leader of my county council and that my service on local authorities extends over 15 years? I was the chairman of the policy resources committee of my council and money was switched around and is switched around by every local authority.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, but there were limitations. If the hon. Gentleman cares to go to the Library, he will see that that is confirmed.

Since money can be transferred between budget heads, if money is wasted in one area, it is because the local authority has made a choice not to spend it elsewhere. When Labour-controlled Birmingham council—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said, "Here we go." When I have finished this catalogue of examples, will the hon. Gentleman defend it?

Mr. Blunkett: Is this to be the same catalogue that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) put on the Order Paper yesterday? If it is, all who can read can be spared the hon. Gentleman's comments now.

Mr. Hughes: I am delighted to say that this is a different catalogue. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out that there are more things on the Order Paper that one can look at, including buying wedding rings for two stone statues at a cost of £50,000. I was not going to mention that.

I want to talk about the 149 trips to foreign countries paid for by Birmingham council. There were 29 trips to France, as well as trips to Puerto Rico, the Gambia, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, the United States of America, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, the Soviet Union and Italy. The trip to Italy took place during the world cup and was supposedly a fact-finding trip to look at football grounds. Birmingham council decided to spend its money in that way and not on sweeping the streets, social services or education. That was the Labour-controlled authority's choice.

Derbyshire spent £1 million on its information department. That is another example of the Labour party making a choice in government. It felt that it would rather spend £1 million on information than on social services or education. Haringey was told that its £3·8 million vehicle bill could be reduced by £1 million if it was properly managed. It has not bothered to try to do so. That money is wasted when it could have been spent on social services or education.

Lambeth has many problems, but last year it spent £42,000 on a stretched limousine for its mayor. Perhaps some local authorities can afford that. I agree with the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms. Hoey) who was incredulous that money should be spent in that way.

Mr. Haynes: Will the hon. Gentleman now criticise the Government for wasting £10 billion on the introduction of the poll tax? How about that one? Have a go at that.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman has many admirable qualities, but being able to add up is not one of them. That figure is conjured out of mid-air. It includes money that has been used directly to help reduce the size of people's bills. If the hon. Gentleman believes that that is money badly spent, he should say so. That money is also included in the fraudulent figures given by the Labour party for its council tax. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways.

There are many problems in the London borough of Haringey. It could have chosen to spend money on social services or education, but it has chosen to spend £500,000 a year on luxury cars for 98 council officials.

I have a flat in Lambeth, as does the Labour party Whip. He and I both know how rotten the services are. Because it provides such rotten services, it is important to be able to telephone the council. One may need something done to one's flat or house. Therefore, it would have been a good use of money for Lambeth to pay its telephone bill to prevent the council being cut off 30 times in one year. That is a waste of money, and its typical of the choices made by Labour councils. It is no wonder that, for three years running, two Labour-controlled councils in London failed to close their accounts by the statutory deadline. If I were running a council like that, I would be embarrassed to close the accounts and let people see what had been done.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): My hon. Friend has been talking about Lambeth. Does he agree with the *Local Government Chronicle* which, when commenting on the district auditor's report, summed up Lambeth as

> "an unresponsive organisation where action is generally achieved only after inordinate delays or in response to a crisis"?

Does that sum up Labour government in Lambeth?

Mr. Hughes: I have some good news about Lambeth. I was told by a senior council official that things were improving and that there were fewer than 10 nutcases left in the Labour group. Things might get better.

Mr. Allen McKay: Say that to those outside.

Mr. Hughes: The official said it outside.

The Labour party has continued with its policy over the past few weeks. Just over a week ago, the Labour party claimed that massive cuts could be made in the defence budget without any redundancies. I thought that that was clever. Also, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) claimed that as Home Secretary he would put many more police on the beat without adding a penny to the Home Office budget. I thought that that was also clever—I do not know whether he does not intend to pay them, but he will have to take that up with the Police Federation.

What have we heard today from the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould)? It is implicit in what he has been saying to his friends that whatever grant system applied—whether it was the standard spending assessment or something else—and were Labour to form a Government, every council would be top of the league. They would all have the same grant as those which currently receive the most. One could not read anything else into his words. However, we know that that is not only impossible but flies in the face of Labour's pretty tawdry record in government.

A Labour Government's agenda for local government has been made clear, at least to me. It is a bit like a Labour acid house party—what matters about an acid house party is not what goes on inside but the fact that one does not tell anyone where it is happening. All the Labour party's policies are conducted in whispers: that has now been revealed in Sheffield, where the Labour authority has plainly done a deal with the Labour Front Bench. The deal was to ask whether, if the authority set a budget that could not be met and if there was a Labour Government—Labour say, when there is a Labour Government—that Government would meet its deficit. In private, those on the Labour Front Bench have plainly said yes, and they have not said yes only in Sheffield.

I have spoken to Conservative council leaders across the country and received some interesting responses. Labour spokesmen are travelling around the country speaking to Labour councillors or Labour groups and echoing the words of Labour's deputy leader who told, I think, Motherwell's Labour council group, "You won't get as much money as you want, but you will get more." In other words, Labour is promising that the election of a Labour Government would be accompanied by more money.

[Mr. Hughes]

Labour refuses to specify how much money or how it would be raised, but we know that it can be raised from only two people, or from one group of people in two different ways. It can be raised by increasing direct taxation, which Labour pretends that it would not do, or by allowing the local government tax bill—the council tax, or its version, which it laughably calls "fair rates"—to soar. That is the reality of Labour party policy.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman speaks as the chairman or vice-chairman—

Mr. Hughes: Vice-chairman.

Mr. Blunkett: —as the vice-chairman of the Conservative party's local government committee. In that prestigious role which the Conservative party grants to such a post, he has already made a statement in a press release last week about members of Labour's Front Bench travelling up and down the country making promises. Will he give us examples—other than the one he has dreamed up about Motherwell and the fictitious and erroneous statement about Sheffield—of the figures, statements and promises, and how much?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman has given me some good news—I did not think that anyone had picked up my press release. I am delighted that he has read it. It has a better circulation than I thought and that will encourage me to publish more. I am enormously grateful to him. He must be patient, because I shall reveal all—he need not worry about that. There are examples from Kent, the west country and the north and they will all be revealed.

The hon. Gentleman should seek advice about the quotation from the deputy leader of the Labour party. Some Labour advisers might be lurking in the precincts of the Chamber to advise him precisely what the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said, but I have cited his exact words—they were spoken in public. If that is what the right hon. Gentleman says in public, God alone knows what he says in private in a smoke-filled room, because it is in the privacy of that smoke-filled room that other words are being used. Unfortunately, Labour council members are revealing all to their Conservative counterparts, and we are receiving the information.

The Labour party, with the tawdry and lacklustre performance of the members of its Front Bench, refuses to face one simple truth. It is fine to say that it will spend more money and that it wants to improve services, but we and the people of this country know that promises have a price and that, unless one can pay the price, the promises are completely empty.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House of Mr. Speaker's appeal for brief speeches.

5.24 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I am glad to have heard all but three minutes of the speeches made so far. I begin by dealing with the overall finance available to local government and the Government's decision to make provision of £41·8 billion for the total standard spending assessment for 1992-93. If we consider that figure and the different services that different local authorities need to deliver, we can conclude only that that figure is inadequate for the job.

The Secretary of State spoke about a 7·6 per cent. increase, but that misleads many people outside the House, because it implies that that is an increase on the services that they enjoyed last year. That is not so. There will be only a 4·8 per cent. increase in the level of services that they had the pleasure to enjoy in 1991-92. We need to establish the facts and not listen to the figures, which I believe are sometimes deliberately intended to mislead so that any blame for subsequent action and mismanagement of services will be attached to local authorities, not to the Government. Let us nail that issue at the outset.

I think that the House has now concluded that 4·8 per cent. is the real sum of money about which the Secretary of State spoke. We need to bring into play the amount of new service provision which local authorities have agreed to provide after Government legislation. I refer briefly to three pieces of legislation—the Education Reform Act 1988, the Children Act 1989 and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. If three are not enough, I could mention care in the community policies.

The provisions of those Acts add to the costs of local authorities, which are expected to bear the additional service demands against a background of a 4·8 per cent. increase. That figure is wholly inadequate for the job, as was demonstrated by the number of local authorities whose representatives have met the Minister at the Department during the past few months. They were of all political persuasions, and they brought home to him the inadequacy of the sums available. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister how many local authorities have written to express their concern about the inadequacy of the financial settlement or have been to see him. That in itself would be quite revealing.

A further problem is that, during the coming year, local authorities will have to pick up other costs which have not been allowed for. There is a 1·3 per cent. tail-end teachers' pay award from 1991, which will come into effect in 1992-93. That does not appear to have been taken into account in the settlement figures. In addition to that 1·3 per cent. carry-over, the Government will fairly soon settle teachers' pay for next year. The allowances for inflation in the figures given for local authorities will be very much below the level of the pay settlement for teachers which local authorities no longer have a say in fixing.

Therefore, local authorities are being asked not merely to begin with a level below the rate of inflation or to deliver extra services, but to deal with decisions taken later which they will find it difficult to meet. They will have to meet them even if they find it impossible: it will be the law, because the Government have centralised the decision-making processes for teachers' pay. Therefore, all local authorities of every political persuasion will conclude that the settlement is wholly and utterly inadequate for the job.

The majority of local authorities will stay within their capping limits. By and large, local authorities want to observe the regulations and do not wish to go outside the law. In a sense that makes it worse, because they pass on to the people in the local community the result of the Tory cuts—and cuts they are.

The position is made worse by central Government trying to interfere in some of the service delivery. Is the Minister aware of a letter sent from the Home Office by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to all chief constables, requesting details of budgets from 1992-93? The letter's effect is that each local authority that funds a police authority should spend up to its SSA on services for the police. Many hon. Members may agree with the figure, but the impact for many local authorities will be that they will have to make cuts in education, in social services, in housing and in other services if they spend that amount on services for the police.

West Midlands was mentioned earlier as a county council that is also a police authority which did not intend to spend up to its SSA on the police. The only alternative would be the wholesale closure of a number of schools. I stress that it would be the closure of schools, not merely the cutting of hundreds of teachers' jobs.

I know that Ministers often do not listen when I speak about local government. All I can do is to cut out *Hansard* tomorrow, send them the statistical information and invite them to dispute the figures. I like to present the figures so that at least I give Ministers the chance to have an intellectual argument. They never enter intellectual arguments with me and I can only assume, as did other hon. Members earlier, that they do not like to listen to people who have actually been in local government for a number of years, because they are afraid that they might learn something.

There is an additional problem which the settlement does not take into account, which is money that local authorities cannot collect through the poll tax. It is not money that they do not want to collect, but money that is uncollectable. Southwark, part of which is covered by the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), has applied for 2,500 liability orders. It is a matter of regret that the Minister and the Secretary of State were not able to support the Opposition proposal in that regard, which could have been put quickly on to the statute book.

As a result of the position in the courts and because the Government could not get their legislation right to begin with, Southwark could lose up to £500,000 of revenue in the short term. No local authority can afford to lose such money. It is not that Southwark does not intend to collect the money; it is doing its best.

The Conservative chairman of the Association of District Councils has said that the response by the Secretary of State to the matter is not enough:

> "We need immediate action to change the law and it must be retrospective."

Co-operation on the matter has been offered by the Opposition, but it has been turned down.

The Minister courteously received a delegation from Eastbourne, my local authority. We outlined the cuts in services that would be necessary in the Eastbourne borough council area. We face a poll tax of about £315, and we told the Minister that a month ago. The response of the Minister and the Secretary of State in the press was that the figures would not be reached, but they will. One reason is that the county council will now spend up to its SSA, which it has never done before. It will put £1·43 million into its budget to increase provision for special educational needs. It must do that; if it does not, it will be taken to court by many parents for failing to provide the special education which families need in East Sussex.

It is all very well to receive a courteous response when one goes to the Department of the Environment. In the group from Eastbourne, we had the Liberal Democrat leader of the council, the Conservative leader of the opposition group, the chairman of the chamber of commerce, the president of the Eastbourne Industrial Association and the chief executive. All gave the same message and the Minister gave the same answer: "I will have to look at it. If I give you anything, I will have to take something from somewhere else." Surely the Minister should conclude that there is not enough money in the pot and that the pot is not big enough. Not only Eastbourne, but other areas should have more consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) tells me about Northumberland county council. He draws attention

> "to the crisis in education in Northumberland where the inadequate SSA has led to cuts of £6·5 million including £3·7 million from the education service. Severe cuts are being imposed on schools which were already providing education at much lower costs per pupil than the rest of the country. Last week, the head teachers of every Northumberland . . . school came to the House of Commons to protest about the effect of the cuts and about the system that has produced them."

Those head teachers were not from one political party, but from the schools, and spoke on behalf of the children in those schools. How can an SSA system and settlement work like that in Northumberland? That county council does not appear on the Government's list of profligate authorities.

Sutton is also controlled by the Liberal Democrats. The Government are imposing limits on Sutton which will lead to an £8 million cut in next year's budget. Sutton has the fourth lowest net expenditure per head of all the London boroughs. It spends less per head than almost all the London boroughs, yet it will have to cut £8 million from its budget next year. In 1991-92, it is spending £561 per head. Kingston upon Thames spends £629, which is much nearer the average. If Sutton spent at the level of Kingston, it could spend another £11 million without being affected by legislation. The cuts in Sutton and the blame for them lie clearly at the door of the Tory Government.

The revenue support grant per adult in Sutton is £485. In Wandsworth, the figure is £977. It is no wonder that Wandsworth can have a nil poll tax for 1991-92 when it gets so much extra per adult compared with most other London boroughs. That is why people keep referring to Wandsworth. However, Conservative Members do not often refer to the services that Wandsworth delivers, although Wandsworth was mentioned in an earlier exchange.

If Conservative Members did refer to the services, they might draw attention to the fact that Wandsworth borough council was taken to court and ordered to pay £12,000 in legal costs after the court heard of an infestation of cockroaches in the York Road estate and in the St. James Grove estate had made tenants' lives a misery because the cockroaches crawled into food, drinks, beds and shoes. If that is the level of services provided in Wandsworth, it is no wonder that the council tax is nil. We should not talk only about the spending, but about the level of services. Every time a Conservative Member starts to shout about Wandsworth, the Opposition will start to shout about cockroaches.

The Isle of Wight has also been mentioned. The Government have successively reduced support to the Liberal Democrat-run county council, which has always provided cost-effective services.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I wish that the hon. Gentleman had spent a little longer looking at the example of

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

Wandsworth, whose services he decried. Is he not aware that there is an excellent comparison between Wandsworth and Lambeth? The comparison has been made by many independent bodies, including the Audit Commission. Does that not show that people in Wandsworth get a better service across the board, respect their council more, feel that they get a better service and pay a great deal less for it?

Mr. Bellotti: I did not want to return to the subject of Wandsworth. I will compare Wandsworth to all other local authorities. I am not prepared to join in a Government attack on a small number of local authorities when we have the interests of all local authorities at heart. However, the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) has given me the opportunity to say that, when one of the tenants approached the council about the cockroaches in her flat, the local authority bribed her to drop her complaint and offered her another flat. The council should have investigated the complaint rather than moving the person, because the problem was then present for the next tenant.

I was talking about the Isle of Wight. The county council there has always delivered services cost-effectively. The SSA which the Government are imposing on the local authority makes it more difficult for the services to be delivered. The choice is stark, not only for the Isle of Wight but for other local authorities: should one exceed one's SSA and inflict a high poll tax—soon to be the council tax—on members of the community, or should one see whether services can be cut?

Mr. Barry Field: I think that the hon. Gentleman heard my intervention in the speech of the Secretary of State. When the Liberal Democrats last fought the county elections, they ran the balances down to £250,000. Balances now stand at nearly £3 million, because the Isle of Wight had the highest shire county settlement of any English county last year. This year, per capita, we have moved up from 14th place to 11th.

I know that the hon. Gentleman has heard me make the point many times before, but in 1962, the Edwards committee considered that, in terms of local government finance, the Isle of Wight was underfunded. Successive Members of Parliament have led delegations to the Department of the Environment to argue the case for an increase in rate support grant or standard spending assessment. None of us disagrees that there is a problem, but it is not something that has suddenly visited us from outer space this year. The cuts that the Liberal Democrats are imposing on the Isle of Wight in this election year are purely political and not dictated by economic or financial necessity.

Mr. Bellotti: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his opinion, but the facts stand. If the Government had not taken increased central control, the Isle of Wight local authority—like all other local authorities—would be in a better position to take its own decisions.

The hon. Gentleman is inconsistent. It seems that today he intends to support the Government and accept the SSA figures, yet he proposes to join a march on Saturday against the cuts—which are really Tory cuts imposed by the Government on Newport and the Isle of Wight. Those actions are wholly inconsistent, and I am sure that people living on the Isle of Wight will realise it. One day the hon. Gentleman votes to support his local authority's SSA, and a few days later he marches against cuts that are the result of Tory action. The hon. Gentleman deserves any conclusion that those on the Isle of Wight may draw. *[Interruption.]* I can only hear the word "balances".

Mr. Barry Field: Three million pounds-worth of balances.

Mr. Bellotti: Those with experience of local authorities know that, in successive years, balances vary—up and down—but the services provided are the key factor in deciding whether the local authority is doing the job that it should.

Before I conclude my remarks—I must say that I am rather enjoying the debate—I want to refer to voluntary organisations. In debating local authorities, we often overlook the role that the voluntary sector plays in our community. The more centralised capping powers and increased restrictions on SSAs the Government put in place, the more the voluntary sector feels the pinch, because the voluntary organisations cannot enter into partnership programmes.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations ably drew that to our attention in its response to "Competing for Quality". The Government's compulsory competitive tendering proposals do nothing to help their situation—in fact, they make it worse. The voluntary organisations are being squeezed out of the partnership programmes that they have provided as a result of the Government's action on compulsory competitive tendering and as a result of the SSAs before us today.

If we really want the voluntary sector to enter into the provision of programmes in our local communities, we must do far more to encourage them. All that happens at present is that local authorities shift their money to items such as special needs—which I mentioned in connection with East Sussex, and which is very important—away from, for example, the provision of play facilities, because the provision of such facilities is not a statutory responsibility. The voluntary sector, which could provide very cost-effective play facilities if it had a grant, no longer receives a grant and cannot provide them.

The Government have not only attacked local authorities; they have attacked councillors of all parties. The latest information we have is that many councillors of all parties are leaving local authorities because they blame the Government for interfering in the provision of services that they were elected by local communities to deliver.

The Government are having such an adverse effect that 42 per cent. of all councillors are standing down after only one term of office. That is an amazing statistic. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about you?"] I can tell the Minister that, in every election that I have fought since 1977, my vote has increased, and that I have no intention of losing that record. When I stand down from my local authority membership, I shall do so with reluctance, because I believe that many of our councillors do a much better job than many of us in the House. Their role is very important and should never be underestimated.

The forced service cuts, the Government's attacks on local councillors and the fact that the Government have given local authorities an uncollectable tax base all lead us to the conclusion that the Government do not value local authorities' work. What we must do is to put into place something that will give local authorities the confidence to deliver services. The Government cannot give them that confidence. We must look elsewhere. We must have people who will serve their local communities.

The people in those local communities know who to blame for the poll tax: they know who introduced it and who is responsible for it. They know who to blame for the cuts in local services; they are in no doubt whatever about that. Those self-same people cannot wait for the opportunity to put the blame on the Government. The earlier we have an election and give them that opportunity, the better.

5.46 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): Opposition Members have implied—indeed, have stated directly—that the SSAs will work to the advantage of Tory councils. I wish someone would explain to me—coming from Warwickshire as I do and knowing the problems that we have had there in the past 12 months, which appear likely to be repeated to some extent—how that can be the case.

Questions have also been raised about the quality of the SSA system. There has been too much writing off of the formula as a Tory ploy dreamed up by the Government —not worth while and not logical. That view needs to be countered. The SSA system is an objective system applying in a fair and proper way to every authority in the country.

It is quite ludicrous to think that one might choose another system for the distribution of central Government resources which would not of necessity involve some formula that would almost certainly appear to benefit one local authority against another. But perhaps the Labour party prefers total patronage, so that it can dish out the money to councils that it thinks should have it and withhold money from councils that it thinks should not.

That would be a much more unfair system. We need a system, such as the SSA system, which can be worked on a formula and which takes into account many of the factors that statistics show have a direct correlation to what one might spend on various services. It is a sensible and logical system.

Having said that, however, I emphasise that any system that serves local government must be fine-tuned and tinkered with continually, because we do not live in a static world—in local government finance or anything else. To cope with changes—whether demographic changes or changes in what the Government require of local government—we need to update and change the arrangements.

Under the present system, Warwickshire almost inevitably seems to come off not very well, to say the least, and distinctly badly in some areas, to put it at its worst. The Audit Commission puts groups into families. The families that it has chosen for us in terms of SSAs and grants invariably put us very near the bottom. No one would suggest that Warwickshire, given the type of county that it is, would normally expect to receive very high levels of grant. By most criteria, it could not be said that the county shares the problems of the inner cities; nor does it have the problem of sparsity of population that is faced by counties such as Northumberland. Nevertheless, we believe that we should have more money than the amount that is distributed to us.

Indeed, distribution is the key. The Government have substantially increased the amount that is available to local government overall, but there has been great difficulty in satisfying each local authority that it has received a fair amount in the distribution. In his usual eloquent manner, my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) explained the problems facing north Shropshire in terms of the distribution. Those problems are common to some of us in the midlands.

Last year, we in Warwickshire had to take a look at all our services, and because education was the big spender, it got the biggest look and was put right at the top of the list. The county council eventually said that it could protect nursery education, but that it would have to make savings elsewhere. This year, it has decided that it will protect the schools' budgets and police spending, but inevitably that means that other services come under pressure. The local authority must consider how its provision of those services can be changed, which may mean staff reductions. Great pressure is placed on local government.

I appreciate that this year, like last year, some changes have been made to the SSAs, and that some are slightly to the advantage of the county of Warwickshire. However, although any swingeing changes may benefit some, they will be to the detriment of others and, by its very nature, local government is totally incompetent to deal with big and quick changes. Warwickshire found the change from grant-related expenditure to the revenue support grant system a big change which was difficult to cope with. That is the nature of local government——

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): My hon. Friend has an entirely deserved reputation in Warwickshire as an assiduous Member for Parliament. I readily acknowledge that he defends his constituents through thick and thin. Will he join me in asking our hon. Friend the Minister of State whether, if Warwickshire should produce a budget that is reasonably above the level of the SSA, he will give helpful consideration to lifting the cap, as he did last year? Such action would be much appreciated by all Warwickshire Members.

Mr. Stevens: I appreciate what my hon. Friend says, and hope that our hon. Friend the Minister of State will listen sympathetically. I am sure that, when we know Warwickshire's budgets, the Minister of State will be willing to meet delegations to explain the position in Warwickshire with the same courtesy as previously.

The effect of the SSA being, as we think, rather low, is that that directly puts pressure not only on services but on the level of the community charge. Depending on how the SSA works, that in turn can affect the district councils as well as the county council.

The Opposition have sought to give the impression that they would do away with the local authority expenditure limits that the Government have suggested. They have implied that a Labour Government would provide as much extra money as the local authorities say they need. The Opposition approach is: "Don't worry, we'll provide a system of local government finance that will work without restrictions. We do not want to restrict local government, but to give it a free hand."

There is no way in which any responsible financial approach is compatible with taking the lid off local government. Many years ago, a senior Labour politician told local government, "The party's over." The Opposition will not be able to bring back that sort of party again.

[Mr. Stevens]

In answer to the point that counties such as Warwickshire are being unfairly treated under the SSA system, the Labour party says, "Don't worry, we'll find a way round it. There will be no problem." However, we know from the Labour party's past practices—this is the implication of what the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said—that the Labour party may well shift the distribution, but that it will almost certainly do so in favour of the urban areas, not the shires, which we believe are the areas that get the weakest deal at the moment.

I hope that, when my right hon. and hon. Friends talk to the local authority associations in the near future, by which time they will be able to take into account data from the 1991 census, they will look carefully at the formula for the SSA. Some of us in the north and the midlands believe that the area cost adjustment gives too much to certain areas but not enough to others. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State and his officials and Warwickshire council officers for taking the time to go through SSA calculations in some detail. Nevertheless, we feel that some factors are over-compensated for and that that problem needs to be addressed.

We should like the SSA to be refined but, to do that, further studies may need to be carried out. The decision on reallocation should not be taken off the cuff. We may need to refine the area cost adjustment—and not only for the south-east. Perhaps we should introduce a graduated area adjustment, but it may not be possible to do that with any accuracy at the moment on the information that is available. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend will consider setting up studies that may lead us to a better, more refined SSA system in the years to come because it —or something very similar—will form the basis of all future distributions of finance to local government.

Local government is in a difficult position, but some of its problems are self-made. My county authority is not profligate, but we believe that the SSA should be adjusted in the next and subsequent years and that it should be refined in an attempt to make it more equitable. I know that my hon. Friend is aware that some changes have only small effects on some authorities but large ones on others. I hope that, in the months ahead, he will look carefully at the ways in which we can adjust the SSA—perhaps to make minor changes, as has happened recently, but perhaps also with a view to making more extensive changes to try to find something that appears more obviously fair to all the local authorities in England.

Finally, the Government's proposals take a realistic view of the total amount that should be given to support local government in the coming financial year, and lay down a good guideline on the amount that local government should be aiming to spend overall. Local government's job must be to provide a base to allow the area to take advantage of its services and to build the community it wants. Local government's job is not to establish the grandiose schemes that we have seen in some authorities, which some people think are good and should be established irrespective of whether the Government think that local government should do that job.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members, that, between 6 pm and 8 pm, speeches will be limited by the 10-minute rule.

5.58 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I gather from the speech of the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) that Warwickshire is in trouble, and from the earlier speech of the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) that Shropshire is also in trouble. Those councils are drawing on their balances to maintain nursery education. Presumably those councils operate in counties where the Minister's friends abound. I ask the hon. Member for Nuneaton and the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North to contemplate what the effect of reducing nursery education would be in east London—in Silvertown, Custom House, Upton Park and such places, where employment is more difficult to find.

One principle in the arithmetic is politically neutral, and depends upon equity and justice. I hope that such high-sounding words prove attractive to the Government. We have heard a lot about SSAs not covering costs, but one SSA is particularly important and has not been named hitherto. It is that on the estimate of capital repayment and interest arising thereon. One should remember that that represents a heavy burden and that roughly 80 per cent. of local authority income comes from Government. That is lower than it should be, and the effects are considerable.

The borough of Newham spends about £28 million a year on paying interest on capital borrowing. I am told by the borough treasurer that, last year, Newham had just over £20 million in its SSA to cover that. This year, we have experienced a shortfall, and the borough has only £18 million in SSA for capital costs. Therefore it has to make up £10 million from other services to cover what is surely an assessable need. The borrowing of £28 million was not sudden or profligate. It was something that any Government, particularly the one that we have had for the past 10 years, would say was necessary. It was approved and known borrowing, with a known repayment. Therefore, the £10 million that the borough is down must be obtained by cutting other services—taking from other SSAs—which is a very difficult job indeed.

I should like the Minister to tell us the basis of the calculations for SSAs and for capital interest. I cannot conceive of any equitable formula that would come up with such a deficit and with such an unjust burden on those services that have to carry it. We have already heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House about the unjust imposition on services. I want the Minister to comment on that, because that expenditure is, by definition, necessary.

Another and perhaps more complex point is equally bizarre and requires some explanation. All over the country, commercial and industrial premises are applying, quite properly, for rate reviews and reductions. Valuation courts have come up with the figures, but we do not know the total yet. In a written answer to me, which appeared on 24 January at column 387, the Government said that they too did not know all the figures.

The borough of Newham put some money aside against such losses, but suddenly, this year, it had to pay for borrowing £6 million to repay rates that were overpaid. That was due not to the rating valuation done by the council but to the valuation of the Government's own agency. If there was an error, it was that of the Inland

Revenue's estimate of rateable values. It had nothing to do with the council. The council has been told by the Government that that money has to be paid back to those firms that have paid too much in rates, despite the fact that the £10 million non-domestic rate pool cannot be touched as a result of legislation passed by the Government.

In my constituency, the council has made two large repayments; one to Tate and Lyle—the big sugar firm—of about £2 million and one to the Post Office, which has a large sorting office in my constituency, of about £1 million. Another £5·8 million must be paid on top of that to other organisations in the borough. That must be paid back in addition to the £10 million I mentioned earlier. All the increases in grant which the Government claim, despite the problems of inflation, will be more than absorbed by those repayments.

The unhappy borough councillors of Newham have been placed in an awful dilemma. That experience is shared by other councillors of all parties in different parts of the country. My councillors have asked whether Newham can capitalise on the money owed in respect of services. That deficit has built up over many years and they want to know whether Newham can take it forward. No, say the Government, it cannot, but they say that it may be possible to capitalise £3 million for two years. It is all up in the air, and I hope that the Minister can give us the proper answer tonight. The Government have said that, if Newham could capitalise, they would not allow it to spend the interest necessary to sustain that capital. I am shocked at that.

In Silvertown, a mother who worked at Tate and Lyle might ask me whether the £2 million that Tate and Lyle had received—big money—could not be spent on school books at Drew road school. We have had to cut the provision of school books. It is also rumoured—I do not believe it to be true—that teachers will be without nursery classes. We have heard that Shropshire has already had to make such a decision.

That mother may ask whether it will be possible to send teachers on courses for the new national curriculum which the Government have imposed upon them. She will want to know whether the quality of her children's life will be reduced because the borough are paying her employers, the Post Office and X and Y company money that the borough should not have received five years ago. That is the position into which the Government have put us. They will not even allow the council to borrow the money to pay those organisations. That seems extraordinary.

All of us receive in the post advertising asking us to borrow. That is part of the Government's philosophy of the free market. However, the Government will not allow Newham borough council to borrow money to ensure that children and teachers get the services which the Government say, by statute, that they want them to have. That is the position. I do not understand why the Government will not allow the council to borrow. I am reminded of the scriptural story of the unjust steward, who was let off his debt by the king but who would not let off his own debtor.

The mechanism hits teachers and children and the future of any community—not just Newham but everywhere else. I have only one answer to that—the Government are ignorant of the effect of their own machine. They are ignorant of what the rules and regulations mean in practice to communities and societies —and yes, society does exist, particularly in east London. The Government are ignorant of injustice, but they must be conscious of it. If the Government are ignorant, they must accept that, and the injustice must be remedied. If the Government are knowledgeable of that injustice, they must remove it, because they would not want that millstone to hang around the necks of children into the next general election.

6.9 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): From the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) we heard the usual Opposition parrot cry for more money. The hon. Gentleman said that there was not enough money in the pot, and we have heard similar noises from other Opposition Members. The one difference between the hon. Member for Eastbourne and other Opposition members is that his party deserves credit for having the honesty to say that it would increase taxes. The Labour party denies that it would increase taxes to pay for the enormously boosted local government spending that it advocates.

This is the last year of the community charge or poll tax. I do not particularly like the council tax, but I like it a lot more than the alternatives—the poll tax, which is going; the rates, to which Labour advocates a return; and the Liberal Democrats' local income tax. The council tax will be seen as sensible and fair. A return to a rates system —something that the Labour party would regard as fair —would unleash an explosion of local government spending. People who have significantly improved their homes and those who live in houses with high market values would be penalised enormously. Of course, that is exactly what Opposition Members want.

As usual, the Liberals try to pretend that butter would not melt in their mouths. They advocate a local income tax. The hon. Member for Eastbourne smiles sweetly, just to prove the point. I am sure that my constituents would not want the Kirklees council to have access to their tax returns. In any case, a local income tax certainly would not be cheap. On the basis of the current spending of Kirklees council, a working couple on average incomes would pay £850 to £900 a year.

The systems being advocated by both Opposition parties have a common additional flaw: they would both remove the capping powers of the Secretary of State. Once again, it would be party time for Labour local authorities. We know how socialist politicians love to spend other people's money. Both main Opposition parties would give those politicians the green light to do exactly that. I have no doubt that, in this respect, the Kirklees local authority would be no different from other high-spending Labour authorities.

In my part of the world, the scare stories for the next financial year have already started. On the one hand, council leaders are threatening to increase the poll tax by 17 per cent.; on the other, the chairman of the education committee is promising cuts in the education service.

Mr. Pawsey: Disgraceful.

Mr. Riddick: Indeed it is disgraceful.

Those education cuts are proposed despite the fact that the education standard spending assessment in Kirklees has been increased well ahead of inflation and the fact that Government grants to Kirklees as a whole are to increase in line with, or slightly ahead of, inflation. The trouble is that Labour's scare stories have a nasty habit of coming

[Mr. Riddick]

true. I very much hope that Kirklees will stick to the Government's guidelines and set a poll tax of no more than £257, which would represent an increase of 7 per cent. Local people would not like it, but I think that they would regard it as fairly reasonable.

It would be an absolute disgrace if Kirklees socialists were once again to cut the education budget, as they are threatening to do. A number of schools in my constituency are struggling to make ends meet. There are two main reasons for this. First, Kirklees council, which is run by the Labour party, cut the education budget last year. Secondly, the local education authority is holding back far too much money for its own central administration. Far more money should be passed down to individual schools.

There are two further reasons for the fact that schools provision—indeed, the authority's budget as a whole—is under pressure and for the fact that Labour authorities throughout the country are setting community charges higher than those of Conservative authorities. First, there is poor management of the available resources and of the services that are provided. Secondly, many Labour authorities set wrong priorities. The rent arrears in Kirklees amount to more than £4 million. It is disgraceful that that money has not been collected. Almost 1,000 council houses are empty.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my hon. Friend's council have a housing problem?

Mr. Riddick: Indeed we do have a housing problem, to which I shall refer later.

On the question of management, I should like to relate an interesting little episode. When it comes to the repair of local roads, the local authority has insisted that it will carry out permanent reinstatement. I have discovered that between £2·5 million and £3·5 million is awaiting payment to the Kirklees council by utility companies. The reason for the delay is that the council has not yet carried out the permanent reinstatement. Some of the work has been outstanding for four or five years. That is pure bad management.

Let me come now to priorities. Like many other Labour authorities, Kirklees council spends almost £1 million on equal opportunities projects and peace committees. Recently, it advertised in the local newspaper six vacancies for equal opportunities officers. I estimate that the cost of that advertising is about £250,000. Secondly, the joint venture company that Kirklees council and a private company have set up is costing an amount well into seven figures. But the joint venture company is not developing derelict sites; it is developing decent sites that could quite easily be developed by private undertakings.

Another interesting fact is that housing associations have lost about £12 million-worth of investment in Kirklees over the past five years. Let me explain why. The council's Labour group is, or has been, very hostile to housing associations. As a result, it has refused to co-operate with the Housing Corporation and the associations. The £12 million that could have come to Kirklees has gone to other local authority areas in the north of England. It is an absolute disgrace.

Let me refer to another interesting local issue. The council is imposing smokeless zones on rural areas, at a cost, this year, of £250,000. This is highly unpopular and totally unnecessary. I should like to go into more detail, but I am running out of time. *[Interruption.]* It is difficult to hear hon. Members.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend is not missing much.

Mr. Riddick: I can quite believe that.

I have heard people say that many young electors have never experienced a Labour Government. What is more, many people have forgotten what a Labour Government are like. I shall tell my constituents that they have had a taste of Labour government in the shape of Labour local authorities up and down the country. At the general election, my Labour opponent will be the leader of the council. I am very happy about that, as I shall have an opportunity to demonstrate that a Labour Government would mirror the antics of Labour local authorities. They would put taxes up as high as possible. It would be profligacy—the expenditure of money on all sorts of madcap schemes. I am confident about the outcome.

6.20 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I am sick and tired of hearing Conservative Members attack Labour-controlled local authorities. We just heard such an attack from the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick). We heard from the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) what is likely to happen in Warwickshire.

My main purpose tonight is to explain what the settlement, if confirmed, will mean to Staffordshire, where we could be talking about £20 million-worth of cuts, a large proportion of which will have to be found from services. Much will depend on how much can be found locally from reserves, but I fear that as a result of the Government not listening to Staffordshire's representations, we could suffer cuts locally of up to £12 million. The people of Staffordshire, including those I represent, should not have to suffer cuts of that magnitude.

It is clear that if the people I represent lived in a county such as Bedfordshire, instead of experiencing an increase of 29·4 per cent. in their standing spending assessment, they would get as much as 45·4 per cent. more. It is not as though the Secretary of State is not aware of the concerns in my area. Delegations and representations to Marsham street from Staffordshire county council have set out those concerns in no uncertain terms. Indeed, it seems that the Secretary of State has not only not listened to our concerns but has not even taken note of the views of his Government colleagues.

Special difficulties have arisen in Staffordshire as a result of the pindown affair. All concerned have been critical of what happened in that case. I pay tribute to the work that Staffordshire county council is doing now in trying to put right what was clearly a wrong. In that process, discussions have taken place with various Ministers, including with those at the Department of Health. There has been much sympathy from the Government about the way in which the wrongs of pindown must now be put right.

That being the case, how can it be that, in addition to not listening to the representations from Staffordshire county council, the Minister has not heeded the advice of his Government colleagues? They have said that they share our concern about the additional resources arising out of the pindown experience which must be made available within the local services budget to meet the costs of additional training and so on for those in need of social services. None of those extra resources will now be available to Staffordshire as a result of the SSA.

Presumably the Minister has not heeded the views of the Secretary of State for Education and Science. It is clear from letters that I have received from parents and others, and in representations made to me at meetings with local head teachers—it seems as though I have been locked into such meetings for whole weekends—that the Secretary of State's pronouncements about the national curriculum and the need to improve educational standards will not be implemented in Staffordshire because of this SSA fixed by the Government.

I am anxious, in the limited time available to me, to consider comparative spending in other areas because the debate is not simply about the overall amount of money available. It is about the distribution of that money and where it should go in terms of social need. We in Staffordshire have a combination of a rural area with high needs combined with the inner-city area of Stoke-on-Trent, which receives little recognition from the Department of the Environment.

The Government should explain why the SSA that has been set will enable Staffordshire to spend only £23 per child w[illegible]in the social index, when some authorities can spend as much as £220 per child. That state of affairs cannot be right. What has Staffordshire done to deserve such treatment?

We hear much about care in the community, about how we shall need to provide more from the social services, and, at the same time, do more to help the carers. I hope that it will not be necessary for Staffordshire county council to go ahead with its proposal to close Tan-y-Bryn, a place of respite for the disabled and their carers. There are proposals to close two workshops for the blind and disabled serving the entire county area, one in Fenton and one in Newcastle-under-Lyme, each of them providing employment for a large number of my constituents. I have visited the workshops and spoken to the people there. I hope that, in the process of setting its budget, Staffordshire county council will find a way to save those workshops. Let it be known that, if they have to close, the blame must be laid squarely at the door of the Government.

I have never received so many letters from pupils, parents, governors and head teachers about education issues. At a time when we are hearing so much about the delivery of the national curriculum, it is being asked locally how it will be possible for Staffordshire to undertake the extra commitments when it may be forced to make cuts of as much as £7 million because of the SSA set by the Government. How will my area finance as many as 400 teaching redundancies? About 190 have already been notified to the Department of Employment.

Imagine the effect of those redundancies on children's education in Staffordshire. I am almost having to write to myself on the subject, for my children go to school in Staffordshire. The local budget has already been reduced. We recently had one of the lowest staying-on rates in the country. Gradually, those rates are being improved by the county council. Schools had to accommodate increased numbers without extra money. Now we seem to be crucified by the Government for making those improvements.

The people of Staffordshire are angry. They do not deserve the cuts that are having to be made. As I say, we have visited Marsham street to make our case, as we have in the past, but nobody listens to us. The Government should redistribute money rather than remove it from areas such as mine. More money should be allowed to Staffordshire because we cannot afford to make the cuts that are being demanded.

Had Staffordshire been another area, such as one of those selected by the Government in their positive discrimination towards some county areas, my county council could receive as much as £38 million more. That would be extra money to spend on necessary services. Instead, we could be suffering cuts to the tune of £20 million. Those cuts will hit us hard. It is impossible to consider cuts of that magnitude in expenditure on highways, schools and the social services without admitting that people will be hit hard.

The people of north Staffordshire appreciate that the Government are responsible for those cuts being made. We all want to do all we can locally to cushion the blow. I hope that the Minister will at least address the problems that we in Staffordshire are experiencing, particularly over pindown, and say that the Government will listen to some of the representations that have been made by Staffordshire county council.

6.29 pm

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): To many people the annual debate on the RSG settlement must be one of the most boring in the House. I rise with no great expectation that the next 10 minutes will add anything to the interest of these proceedings [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] However, it is one of the most important debates that takes place in this Chamber. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was absolutely right in emphasising, when he opened the debate, that the House should explore thoroughly how £33 billion of taxpayers' money is spent.

Local council spending touches the lives of our constituents more directly than does almost any other item of expenditure upon which Parliament has to vote each year. It is inevitable that the Government should seek to control local authority spending, given the proportion of the gross national product devoted to local government services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) recalled the former Labour Secretary of State, Tony Crosland, saying many years ago that the party was over in local authority spending. With a large Conservative majority on Norfolk county council in those days, we did our best to follow the Labour Government's programme of restraining local council expenditure. That, I might add, was in the teeth of the opposition of the Labour group at county hall. I recall our sending a deputation in 1979 to protest about the rate support grant settlement announced by the then Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who is now back in that job.

Seven years ago, I made my maiden speech in the RSG debate and, while I sought to observe the convention of not being too controversial, I could not avoid criticising the way in which the Conservative Government, just elected, had treated the Conservative county council in Norfolk. This may be why these annual debates on local authority expenditure are boring: we have to keep on saying the same thing over and over again. Here we are with another RSG settlement that is patently unfair in the

[Mr. Michael Carttiss]

way it treats the people of Norfolk, who send to this House seven Members in the Conservative interest, of whom three are prominent members of this Administration on the Treasury Bench.

I wish that the accusation by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) that the Secretary of State helps Tory authorities over and above Labour-controlled councils was near the truth. It is not true for Shropshire, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) said. It is not true for Warwickshire, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton said and as my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) will have a chance to say later. It certainly is not true for Norfolk.

On 9 December, the county treasurer's report to the county council about the RSG provisional settlement, announced by the Secretary of State on 26 November, concluded:

> "Overall, the proposed settlement can be described as a difficult one which hopefully, subject to the level of future pay awards and inflation, will enable us to maintain our existing services"—

that is loyalty, and I draw it to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government—

> "but which is unlikely to leave any room to tackle many, if any, of the new demands on our services."

Norfolk's provisional SSA for 1992-93 was £446·460 million, which was a 6·8 per cent. increase over the 1991-92 figure of £417·945 million. That is a cash increase of £28·515 million, for which we are very grateful. This increase for Norfolk of 6·8 per cent. compares with the average increase nationally of 6·8 per cent.—so we are on a level playing field there—but the average county increase —and, as my hon. Friends representing shire counties have said, which shire counties have benefited remains to be seen—has been 7 per cent. The figures for the neighbouring East Anglian counties, which have much in common with Norfolk, are: Cambridgeshire, 7·5 per cent., Lincolnshire, 6·9 per cent., and Suffolk, a disastrous 5·9 per cent.

However, the settlement announced on 24 January robbed Norfolk—that is, my constituents—of about £0·5 million. The county council confidently expected an increase because of the change in the rules which allows any addition to the police establishment—and we had an increase in our police establishment, approved by the Home Secretary—to be included in the first year; normally a council would have to finance the first year on its own. Despite this, Norfolk's RSG has gone down by nearly half a million pounds, and the capping limit is reduced in line. This reduction at this late hour, as the leader of the Norfolk county council has pointed out, makes a nonsense of sound planning. It also undermines the claim by spending departments in Whitehall that it is all in the SSA.

Incidentally, Cambridgeshire, which had the most generous settlement announced in November for the East Anglian counties, has gained from the January settlement. So a relatively poor county such as Norfolk has lost money to a rich area such as Cambridgeshire. I am sure that has nothing to do with the fact that one of the Members for that county is my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and another is my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant).

Sir Anthony Grant: If what my hon. Friend says is true, and I am sure it is, does he not find it absolutely astounding that, with one accord, Labour and Liberal politicians in Cambridgeshire have been spending months complaining how mean the Government are, and are still doing it?

Mr. Carttiss: What people in Cambridgeshire do does not surprise me, especially the Liberal and Labour people there. Fortunately, there are not many Liberal and Labour people in Cambridgeshire.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) drew attention to the effect of the teachers' pay award. Norfolk has a relatively low SSA, and the county council has had minimal room for manoeuvre within its budget, bearing in mind the pressures that we have in our county from a rising local population and additional crime. The teachers' pay award will cause budgetary difficulties if it is significantly above inflation and if the Government do not then make the appropriate upward adjustments to the SSA and the RSG.

As a former member of the teaching profession, I am very happy for the Government to approve a pay award above the rate of inflation, but they must make that extra pay award feature in the RSG settlement. In other words, Her Majesty's Treasury must look after that above-average pay rise, if it comes, and not expect local authorities to find that extra money from within their own budgets at the expense of other services, given the point that has already been made about local authorities having no say in or control over that item of expenditure.

Speaking of teachers prompts me to comment on the capital allocation for education in Norfolk, which has been limited to £3·1 million. That is an extremely low allocation, particularly compared with our neighbours in the rest of East Anglia: Suffolk, education capital allocation £11·3 million; Lincolnshire, £12·4 million; and, once again, Cambridgeshire £13·9 million. Norfolk, I repeat, has only £3·1 million. It would be monstrous if, having spent just above SSA, we had charge capping.

I have one minute left, I am advised, to draw the attention of the House to the problem that arises from sea defences. The people of Great Yarmouth and Norfolk are not expected to pay for the Navy. The last time that we helped with the cost of the Navy from our local expenditure in Yarmouth was in 1338, when the town magistrates provided money for men-of-war against the nation's enemies. In 1340, we provided half the fleet for Edward III's battle against the French at Sluys, which we won.

Flood defences are a nationwide responsibility, as they should be, yet they feature within the local authority budget. If the Yarmouth borough council spends over its SSA, including the cost of sea defences, it will lose money.

No doubt, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will call me to order when I reach the absolute limit of my time, but I want to say that in Great Yarmouth we want to spend £150,000 on a coastal strategy defence study. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will eventually pay for it. MAFF is constantly urging us to increase expenditure. The levy from the National Rivers Authority is 8·7 per cent., yet the Department wants to limit us to 6·5 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am sorry, but I must call the hon. Gentleman to order now.

6.39 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Langbaurgh): I wish to highlight the major impact that the Secretary of State's announcement on standard spending assessments will have on the local councils that cover my constituency.

My constituency is served by Cleveland county council and two borough councils, Langbaurgh and Middlesbrough. Those model local authorities have all been the subject of favourable comments by the district audit service. I am proud to say that they are all controlled by the Labour party, as demonstrated by their continuing electoral success. They will all be severely affected by the Secretary of State's announcement.

Langbaurgh borough council has been allocated an SSA increase of 1·5 per cent. and Middlesbrough borough council's SSA has been decreased by 0·2 per cent. The chief executive of Cleveland county council, in a letter to me dated 20 January, said that the SSA announcement for Cleveland county council has

> "required some very difficult decisions. The need to stay within the overall limit is complicated very substantially by the pressures arising from other government legislation, especially in Social Services where the implementation of the Care in the Community and the Children Act are estimated to cost £4·9 million in the perfect world".

He goes on to say that, unfortunately, we do not live in that perfect world—how right he is—and that only £1·6 million can be spent in those areas. That budget decision will adversely affect some of the most vulnerable in our society—people living institutional lives and young children, possibly in peril. The fact that new duties have been imposed on local councils while cuts have been made in resources is plainly an example of double dealing.

The chief executive of Cleveland council also tells me that he is "unlikely" to be able to meet new statutory legislation for trading standards inspections and that he will be unable to recommend the allocation of additional funds to schools for the implementation of future stages of the national curriculum. That means that our children's futures will suffer and local people may find that the consumer watchdogs on which they rely to protect them from sharp practices will be left toothless—a grim prospect.

Although the position within local councils is obviously grave, amazingly, Cleveland county council is comparatively fortunate because its SSA is relatively close to its actual expenditure under the arcane Department of the Environment rules apparently agreed to by the Secretary of State. For the two borough councils in my constituency, the situation is far worse. Langbaurgh is perhaps the worst affected, being in the unique position of covering some of the poorest urban areas in mainland Britain and an ex-mining area of rural villages. Consequently, it is designated by the Government as both an urban programme authority and a rural development area, a position that is unique to Langbaurgh. I hope that that gives hon. Members some idea of the problems with which that authority must grapple.

The announcement of an SSA for Langbaurgh of £12·16 million—an increase of 1·67 per cent. over 1991-92—has come as a body blow to Langbaurgh. That is not a knee-jerk reaction. The council previously employed a leading firm of accountants, Peat, Marwick, McLintock, to examine the SSA and its impact on the authority. The accountants found that the low SSA was due to two specific factors. The first is the ward-weighted density factor. Langbaurgh has undergone a ward boundary exercise, but the new wards were not used by the Department of the Environment. Peat, Marwick, McLintock argued that the use of census enumeration districts would give the Department a better picture of the borough's needs. Secondly, the all-ages social index lost the borough some £1·2 million, whereas the borough had expected to gain because of its pressing social problems.

Langbaurgh cannot use its reserves, because almost all of them have been used to alleviate heavy payments in last year's budget exercise. The district auditor has told the council that the balances are now dangerously low and should be increased from £500,000 to £1 million. That is a difficult, if not impossible, task to accomplish, but it has not deterred the Secretary of State from telling Langbaurgh that he is ready to use his capping powers, which would discriminate against some of the poorest people in one of the poorest boroughs in Britain. If the rules are not relaxed, people in Langbaurgh will suffer this winter.

Langbaurgh's grim problems will intensify as the full impact of the recession begins to bite. In the past year, we have continually seen news of sackings in the borough's traditional industries of steel and chemicals. Those sackings come on top of the already high unemployment figures, which, incidentally, are not used in devising the borough's SSA and they can only mean more pressure on the borough's local services and council aid.

Middlesbrough, too, will suffer. Along with Langbaurgh, it has all the problems associated with long-term unemployment, poverty and ill health. It wants desperately to work to remedy those social evils and create a living environment that is fit for the 21st century.

Given that the statutory housing responsibilities of Langbaurgh and Middlesbrough borough councils are effectively ring-fenced, their grave problems have led to a new round of rent rises, and their highways duties are managed on an agency basis for the county council. That can only mean massive budgetary cuts in their work in non-statutory areas.

Another aspect that will have a severe impact on our people is the possible loss of bus passes, which will be particularly resented by local senior citizens in my area. The secretary of the Cleveland Pensioners Association said that any cuts

> "will have a devastating effect on old people."

For some, it could mean virtual imprisonment in their own homes and a charge in their daily lives that could mean a difference between life and death.

Two weeks ago, a typical local senior citizen visited me in my surgery. Tom Miller lives in the village of Carlin How in east Cleveland and suffers from heart and chest problems. He told me that the withdrawal of bus passes would make him and his wife virtual prisoners in their village. For Tom Miller and his neighbours, many of the facilities that we take for granted, such as visiting a doctor, supermarket or local market, involve a bus journey of many miles. Mr. Miller has written to the Secretary of State for the Environment, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman's reply will not be an attempt to fob him off with the usual feeble rhetoric or an attempt to divert the blame on to our hard-pressed local authorities, because Mr. Miller and his neighbours have already rumbled him.

Only last week, I attended a public meeting of senior citizens who expressed deep anxiety about the cuts in Langbaurgh borough council's SSA. The council's work

[Dr. Ashok Kumar]

and that expression of local pride and autonomy are threatened by the Secretary of State's announcement. The real agenda is obvious. At heart, the Secretary of State does not like the idea of local people deciding their futures and destinies. At heart, he is still an enthusiast for the view that the man in Whitehall knows best, so long as that man is the Secretary of State for the Environment.

I give the Secretary of State notice that, in a few short weeks, his record and views will be judged by the electorate. From my day-to-day work and my life in my constituency, I know what the verdict of the thousands of local voters living in Middlesbrough and Langbaurgh will be. They want an end to the callous disregard for local government, and an end to the Government who have fostered and nurtured that disregard.

6.49 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Any debate on local government finance is liable to tax people's understanding even more than central and local government tax their purses. It is an arcane subject, mainly because central Government pick up the lion's share of the bill. There is therefore a complex relationship between local and central Government at the heart of which is the revenue support grant system, SSAs and all the rest, with a myriad mathematical equations, incomprehensible to normal people, amongst whom I count myself.

Therefore, I intend to take a broad-brush approach in raising first a specific matter involving local government structure and expenditure, where change could be made to achieve a cheaper system, more accountable to local people and less expensive in central Government grants. Too many powers are exercised by county councils which ought to be carried out more locally. I appreciate that the Local Government Commission is being created to investigate the best future structure for local authorities. I very much welcome that.

In the meantime, however, county councils continue to exercise very wide overlapping planning powers which brings them into conflict—sometimes serious conflict—with district or city councils which also have fully-fledged planning departments. It is true, of course, that the system allows for an application to my right hon. Friend to call in a planning application so that conflicts can be resolved. However, this is a most expensive procedure which falls on local charge payers and on the grant system.

There is a good example of serious planning conflict in Portsmouth in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), who cannot be here because of Select Committee duties. The problem affects his constituency, but also mine because many of my constituents live in the vicinity.

In Quatremaine road, Hilsea, there is a waste incinerator site. On it stands an incinerator which has been shut down. Adjoining the site is land belonging to Portsmouth city council. A planning application is before the county council, the planning authority—not Portsmouth city council—for an enormous new energy-from-waste incinerator. Its size and scale are such that it would require also the adjoining site belonging to the city council which would need to be compulsory purchased. The new incinerator would dominate the landscape like some hideous, belching, secular cathedral—tower, chimney and all.

Portsmouth city council is unanimously against it, not on the ground that Portsmouth is not prepared to see a reasonable size state-of-the-art waste disposal system on the existing site which will deal with the waste of Portsmouth and perhaps Havant, Gosport and Fareham too, but because the proposal is intended to deal with waste from all over Hampshire, and no doubt from West Sussex as well under contract, with the massive environmental impact that will have, not least on a densely populated residential area but also on the road system. Portsmouth wants other areas to take responsibility for their waste disposal and not have it all transported in one direction.

That is precisely the sort of example which underpins my conviction that dual county-city planning powers should not exist. Further, if on 9 March the county council planning committee does not take account of the strength of feeling in Portsmouth by rejecting the proposal, it will serve as the most eloquent support from Portsmouth to look after all its own council affairs again, as a unitary authority, rather than being subsumed in a remote, out-of-touch, over-blown, administrative and political structure in Winchester which costs far too much money—our money—for all the good it does.

Incidentally, sensible local government reform is one of the best reasons for supporting the return of a Conservative Government at the general election. The proposals of the Labour and Liberal parties would result in a whole new tier of regional government—heaven forbid—with all its increased bureaucracy and bloated cost in grant and so on.

In Portsmouth, where we have a Labour administration propped up by Liberals, we have learnt the lesson that I hope the whole country will heed: there is nothing to choose between Labour and Liberals. There are two ways of getting Labour national or local government—by voting Labour or by voting Liberal. Just as in local government their policies are barely distinguishable, in this place eight out of 10 times they vote in the same lobby.

In another area of local government expenditure which involves considerable central taxation support—housing—housing revenue account subsidy and housing investment programme capital grants are only obliquely connected to revenue support grants, but a council's housing policies and programmes have a great impact on taxpayers and local charge payers.

Portsmouth has not only done well this year out of the revenue support grant but also the HIP allocation, which in a difficult year has risen by 3 per cent. in real terms—recognition by the Government of the extra help required and deserved to meet housing needs in Portsmouth. To its credit, the Labour administration has continued the sensible housing enabling strategy of its Conservative predecessors, hence the increased Government support. Of course, we shall never get to the bottom of housing need, however deeply the taxpayers and charge payers dip into their pockets, until we mobilise the private sector by taking a further look at the destructive workings of the rent Acts in that vital area.

The Labour party and the Liberals suggest that housing needs could be met by a new spending spree, including allowing councils to spend all the proceeds of council home sales, which in their hearts they still oppose, instead of having the present restriction of 25 per cent. of the product of such sales. Allowing 100 per cent. expenditure would certainly lead in the short term to more council houses being built. However, apart from the horrendous effects on public expenditure and inflation, it would have only a temporary influence on waiting lists. As we saw in the 1960s and 1970s, virtually unrestricted council building just does not cure waiting lists and brings in its wake massive debt and expenditure on maintenance to be borne by future generations. We are still paying off the massive debts built up in that era, when it was thought that those policies would cure the housing problem.

The enabling policies being pursued at present, with sensible building for particular social purposes in partnership with housing associations, is sensible and defensible. I am glad that those policies are being carried out in Portsmouth, with Government grant to help in various ways to address the problems of the city's homelessness and inadequate shelter.

The revenue support grant system will never please everyone, but I am delighted to pass on to my right hon. and hon. Friends the news that their support for Portsmouth has been noted.

6.56 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I always enjoy following the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin), not just because occasionally we are paired, but because he is never one to underwhelm the House. He puts his case boldly and fully, although I rarely agree with what he says. However, he is one of the few Conservative Back Benchers whose views on local government are clearly understood by the Opposition.

In the past four months, the Minister of State and I have spent much time together, in Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill and the Local Government Bill, and also in discussions in his office in Marsham street. So that I do not put him to sleep, I do not intend to go over the ground that I have already covered with him about my own authority.

I wish to highlight the reasons why my local authority, with other metropolitan authorities, feels let down by the Minister of State's announcement about standard spending assessments. The views that I shall express have already been expressed by others, such as the local chamber of commerce, the leader of the Conservative group in my local authority and *The Times*.

Recently, *The Times* did a survey of local authorities, covering value for money, quality of service, efficiency of service and the way that Government perceives the development of services. *The Times* found that Wigan borough council gives value for money and that its services are run efficiently. In answer to questions, Ministers use my local authority as an example of best practice to other local authorities on how to run departments such as education, housing and social services. However, for the second time, my local authority will face substantial cuts of more than £10 million in its budget. In the past two financial years it has had to cut £37 million from its budget simply because of the way in which the Government calculate standard spending assessments.

On Monday 3 February, under the heading "Spending curbs land thrifty Wigan with 20 per cent. poll tax rise", *The Times* local government correspondent said:

"Wigan, run by Labour moderates,"—

the Minister of State knows from my speeches in Committee that I am a moderate person who always puts his arguments moderately—*[Laughter.]* I knew that hon. Members would be tickled by that—

> "has become a by-word for the inadequacy of the grant system. Praised by ministers and the Audit Commission for its efficiency, the borough council has had to make £37 million worth of cuts in the past two years. It has been forced to shed 1,250 staff from a workforce already smaller than the national average and spends less on services than many Conservative councils. It also has one of the best records of poll tax collection."

The authority also has the third lowest level of council house rent arrears. It has proved to the Government time and again that it provides value for money in the way that it manages and produces its services.

However, last night my local authority was meeting in emergency session to decide where to make substantial cuts that will include redundancies of about a further 1,000 staff in the housing, direct labour, community care and education departments. There is the possibility of hundreds of teachers being made redundant in order to meet the Government's spending targets. Given the funds it receives and the amounts allocated in SSAs, how can my authority provide the same level of care for children at risk as Wandsworth council, which receives eight times the amount of grant?

Just a few miles down the road is Manchester, another inner urban authority. My authority receives less than £900 per person to spend on local services, while Manchester has £1,448. Yet my regional authority is placed twelfth out of 104 in terms of the number of GCEs obtained. It receives £510 per head for local schools, compared with an average of more than £700 per head in the other metropolitan authorities, including the inner London authorities, which receive many hundreds of pounds more to provide the same basic services.

How can an authority that is so efficient in the level and spread of services it provides find itself losing millions of pounds of resources due to the way in which the Government calculate SSAs? I am not the only one to be puzzled; *The Times* agreed with me. The chambers of commerce also agreed, and when their representatives met the Minister of State, they made it absolutely clear that they supported the authority and were dismissive of the Government's attitude to SSAs. They said that the Government's position was undermining the local economy.

The representatives understand that many of the services provided by the local authority are supplied in conjunction with the private sector. When the authority has substantially to reduce its service budgets, the people to lose will include not just those who receive the services, but local companies involved in the tendering to provide those services.

Councillor Chadwick, the leader of the Conservative group on Wigan borough council, agreed that the way in which the SSAs are calculated was wrong. He agreed with the authority that the Government are manipulating and massaging the figures to produce the assessments, to the detriment of authorities such as Wigan. He was bitterly disappointed at the failure of the Minister of State to show any recognition of the level, delivery and value for money of services provided by my local authority.

Therefore, it is clear that not just the Labour party, but local industry, the local Conservative party and a Conservative-backed newspaper—*The Times*—hold the

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same views. One cannot get a broader consensus. The Minister cannot say that the view is held only by the bleeding hearts of a socialist council, supported by Labour Members of Parliament. Many local authorities in the north, in Yorkshire, Lancashire and particularly Greater Manchester are aggrieved as they witness the effects of SSAs, which always result in their receiving a lower level of grant.

In previous debates the Minister has alluded to the marked discrepancy in the way in which SSAs are calculated. In meeting with the local authorities he recognised that there is a need to consider marginal aspects, but he is not prepared to accept the substantive argument that major problems exist. As a result, growing numbers of local authorities are being caught in the net of the SSA calculations which do not take into account the large, rural hinterlands attached to many metropolitan boroughs, the social deprivation of many of those boroughs and the fact that the transport system precepts now come out of the district council local budgets.

We in Wigan have to pay the capital cost of the new rail link to Manchester airport and the introduction of the metrolink in Manchester. That is because the Minister of State, in his days at the Department of Transport, removed the precepting powers of the Greater Manchester transport authority. As a result, if Wigan wants to maintain its bus system, it must take the money from schoolkids, pensioners, industrial development and the promotion of jobs—the same is true of Yorkshire. If money is not taken from those sectors, the investment in public transport will be dramatically reduced. Either way, local authorities cannot win.

I see that the light is flashing, which means that I must sit down—and Mr. Deputy Speaker is making circling hand signals for me to sit down. I feel as though I am in a television studio.

If not this evening, then at an early stage in Committee, will the Minister of State give us an idea of when the Government will take seriously the issue of SSAs and look for a change in the system? The Minister has the excuse of the introduction of a commission to review local government. Therefore, he could take that oppportunity to change the SSA system.

7.7 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Local government in many parts of the country has still not accepted the words of Mr. Anthony Crosland about the party being over for local government spending. However, this local government spending settlement is reasonable, and the Government have been more than generous to local government. Total spending for 1992-93 is £41·8 billion —an increase of 7·2 per cent. That represents the maximum amount that the Government think it will be necessary for local authorities in England to spend in 1992-93 to provide a standard level of service.

In order to encourage local government, we must ensure that we get the best value for our money—that is what it is all about. It is not good enough to say, "Spend, spend, spend"; consideration must be given to obtaining good value.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), like many Opposition Members, constantly whinges about the amount of Government grant. He does not apply his mind to the issue of generating the tax income that goes into local authority expenditure or consider the community charge payer, who has to fork out for those services, or the income taxpayer and business taxpayer, who have to provide the money, through the Treasury, to make up the grant. One must generate wealth to spend it, and only my right hon. and hon. Friends understand the necessity to create the financial resources that allow grants to be made.

Overall standard spending assessments have increased by 6·8 per cent., which is well above the rate of inflation. Local government should be able to live with that figure. The average increase in respect of specific grants—such as for the police—is even higher, at 11·9 per cent. The increases in most SSA totals are also well above the inflation rate—14·7 per cent. for the police; 15·2 per cent. for all other services; 8·3 per cent. for fire services; 7·2 per cent. for social services; and 7·1 per cent. for education. Those major increases reflect the circumstances and represent a prudent and sensible settlement.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman should tell the truth.

Mr. Hind: I will tell the truth also about Labour-controlled local government.

A large number of whingers in local government and in the House constantly complain about spending levels, but they never worry about how the money will be raised or about the impact that higher expenditure will have on the individual and the business community.

The authorities in the top 20 for uncollected rent are all Labour controlled. Liverpool is sixth, with some 26 per cent. of its tenants behind with rent totalling £16·4 million. Imagine what a local authority could do with that sum. Labour-controlled Preston is in 16th place. Some 9 per cent. of its tenants owe rent totalling £1·56 million.

Of the 20 local authorities with the highest proportion of empty dwellings as a proportion of their total housing stock, Liverpool has 9·7 per cent. of its properties vacant; Manchester, 6·47 per cent.; Salford 6·23 per cent.; Burnley, 5·84 per cent.; and Knowsley, on the edge of my constituency, 4·49 per cent.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Not to mention Sheffield.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend is right, because Sheffield also has one of the worst records in that respect.

At a recent local government conference, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) complained that the 1989-90 revenue support grant was £6 billion to £7 billion short of the sum needed. Is that a measure of the amount that a Labour Government, in the unlikely event that one were elected, would ask the electorate to pay? That would require a tax increase of 2p or 3p in the pound. We should add that to the £37 billion of excess spending that Labour has promised in its documents and in the House.

We must consider also the impact of Labour's local government proposals on those who would have to pay. Labour would end tendering for services, which would create a large loss that would have to be met by the council tax or whatever form of rates applied. Labour would also sweep away the Audit Commission, which identified £1·2 billion of potential local government savings and has seen £650 million of them actually achieved. Under Labour, there would be no watchdog to exercise such control.

Labour would create large numbers of new quangos, with all their excessive costs, and increase costly new bureaucracy at the expense of the local taxpayer. Above all, Labour would abolish the capping restrictions that Parliament placed on local authority spending, which protects local government taxpayers from being milked and imposes a degree of necessary prudence. In the past, certain local authorities served as milch cows for irresponsible left-wing councillors. They did little for the community, but drove out jobs.

The uniform business rate is controlled by central Government and is currently set at the rate of inflation. Labour would hand back the uniform business rate to local authorities. In the late 1980s, we saw in places such as Liverpool and Manchester a sharp increase in business rates. Jobs and investment were driven out, with the consequence that the actual take went down. Massive unemployment followed in those areas, but constituencies such as mine benefited from businesses moving from profligate, high-spending Labour-controlled areas to low-cost areas run by Conservative councils, where they could make better profits, expand, invest and create new jobs.

The future under Labour would be spend, spend, spend. Local authorities already spend an enormous amount of money and certain limits must be imposed. We must ensure responsible control if there is to be sensible local government budgeting in future.

The capping rules were changed recently and many councils that spent more than £17 million found themselves caught as a consequence of using their investments to balance their budgets. Under the new capping criteria, many of them will be required to reduce their expenditure. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to allow such councils two years in which to reduce their expenditure to the required level. When my hon. Friend gives that matter his consideration in April, he may agree that that is a reasonable provision.

Capping is a necessary mechanism of central Government, and I am sure that the public recognise that we finance local government sensibly and do not take advantage of those who have to pay local government tax. The public can look to a Conservative Government to ensure that will continue to be the case in future. In those circumstances, I urge all my right hon. and hon. Friends to support the motion.

7.17 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Our annual debates on local government finance are replete with esoteric jargon and initials—such as SSA, meaning the standard spending assessment. The operative word is "standard". Everything is to be standardised across the country. There is no local decision-making, but everything is centralised; the man in Whitehall knows best. Local manifestos and the wishes of local voters do not seem to matter. Instead, a standard is set at the centre. There is no local discretion or judgment, and democratically elected councils are told what to do. Even committees are told what are their individual SSAs and how much they can spend. All local freedom of choice is eliminated.

How does this affect the London borough of Newham? If it rolls forward its existing programme and does not add anything new, it will spend £11 million in excess of the cap set by the Department of the Environment. It will therefore have to make painful cuts in its services—but not because the council is profligate or loony. First, the capital financing SSA is inadequate. This covers the cost of servicing the capital debt, and to service the capital debt costs £30 million. The borrowing is Government approved, but the Government-approved SSA is only £18 million: there is therefore a £12 million deficit.

Secondly, there is no procedure for recognising the existence of homelessness in the SSA, which is a major problem in my part of the world. Council housing provision has virtually come to an end; there have been many repossessions, and we have many refugees. Homelessness costs my borough roughly £5 million, but, although the SSAs do not provide for that, the Government have imposed a legal duty on us to deal with the problem. So we should have an extra £12 million for capital financing, and £5 million for homelessness—£17 million more.

If my authority had that extra £17 million, it would find itself in a reasonably comfortable position, but instead it is having to make major cuts. A meeting took place last night to discuss the matter. As education represents 50 per cent. of our local expenditure, cuts are inevitable. My area is not doing well in the education league table; the east end is struggling, in difficult circumstances, to raise education standards. Now, however, we are being forced to make these painful cuts.

Parents and teachers object to the cuts. Last night a demonstration took place outside the town hall; my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) was present. The councillors, who do not want to make the cuts, are being forced to do so. They are also having to sack members of staff, who are resisting by going on strike: Newham's poll tax department is on strike now.

I congratulate the Minister on having sat through the debate so far, and thank him for his courtesy in meeting us last night. I believe he knows that the people who run Newham council are honest people, and that the council is honest, too. It is not a loony council in any respect; yet, although it is situated in a part of east London that has many problems, it is having to endure these agonies. I wonder that those councillors are even willing to remain in local government. It is not their fault that cuts are being made in essential services, but they are taking the stick. Every night they are barracked by crowds outside the town hall; but they are only the messenger boys—the tools of the Government. They have no local discretion.

The Government do not want local government, which involves discretion and democracy, the issue of manifestos and voting by the local electorate. What they want is more local administration, as applies in the health service: those who run the health service are appointed, not elected—and most seem to be card-carrying members of the Conservative party. They do what they are told; the law is laid down centrally. The Opposition want proper local government.

The story gets worse. There are also the rate refunds resulting from backdated rateable value adjustments. The Minister listened very patiently to our views on that last night. At the time when the rates were abolished, a number of commercial ratepayers had appeals outstanding against the rateable valuation of their properties. Such appeals are

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determined by valuation courts. In Newham, the valuation court's decisions have resulted in an estimated reduction of £6 million in rate income. This is on top of all the other problems that I have mentioned.

Let me stress that Newham has no control over the refunds. The original rateable value was set by the Inland Revenue; it had nothing to do with the council. The appeals had nothing to do with the council either. The council comes in only when it has to pick up the costs. This has made the local position almost impossible.

Something must be done. Last night, the Minister was willing to listen to a number of options, and I hope that since then he has come up with a solution. The first option was that the cost of the refunds should be chargeable to the Collection Fund, and be met from the non-domestic rate pool. That is Newham's favoured option. The second was that the cost should be treated as a disregard for capping purposes; but that would merely raise the poll tax level, and I see little point in such a move.

A third option was to ask the Department of the Environment to increase Newham's temporary revenue borrowing limit for 1992-93. That would spread it over two years; I should prefer it to be spread over a longer period. The final option was for the authority to be allowed to capitalise the refund costs. That would help Newham only if the Department provided additional credit approvals to enable the capitalisation to take place, because the council's capital programme is already fully committed. We are asking only for approval to borrow, to make payments staggered over five or six years, so that our position is not made untenable. We are not asking for cash from the Government.

The Minister of State listened very carefully to our submissions, and I hope that he will be able to give some good news to a council that is struggling, in good faith and with the best will in the world, to find a way through its terrible difficulties.

7.27 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton): all our debates on local government finance, whether the community charge or the rating system is involved, are a nightmare. That has been true for as long as I have been in the House. It is very difficult for us not to become extraordinarily confused, so I shall confine my remarks to East Anglia; I shall not move an inch north of Norfolk, or take a step along the road to Wigan pier.

I referred to Norfolk because my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) made a powerful speech on behalf of his constituency in particular and Norfolk generally. He pointed out how differently Cambridgeshire had been treated in regard to the revenue support grant. Let me explain the position.

I wish that some of the socialist and Liberal politicians who make such a clamour in Cambridgeshire about the tight-fistedness of central Government were present now. If they had heard not only the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth, but those of hon. Members representing such areas as Wigan, Sheffield and so forth, they would have realised that Cambridgeshire's settlement is not at all bad.

For many months, my hon. Friends representing other parts of Cambridgeshire have had to point out that Cambridgeshire has been unfairly treated in the past, because it has been one of the fastest-growing counties in the country. At one time, it was the fastest growing in population terms, because so many people wanted to move to such an excellent place.

I am not saying that we are the fastest-growing area, but we are the fastest growing in terms of population, certainly much faster than Norfolk. We have had a bad deal in previous years, but this year we spent a long time talking to the Government about the problems. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State and to the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) who have been extraordinarily patient and have looked into this in enormous detail and listened to us carefully when we explained the problems.

As a result, we have achieved a 7·5 per cent. increase in RSG, which is a satisfactory solution and a reasonable compromise. We are not top of the list of counties, but we are ninth out of 39 and fourth in the list of shire counties in terms of percentage per head of population. Therefore, we have nothing to complain about. There is to be a 7·5 per cent. increase in education. In that respect, the county council has wisely and sensibly made primary education its priority and has not put the full burden on secondary education. I commend the county council for its wisdom.

The police are important and it is necessary to have an adequate Government precept for them. Cambridgeshire has embarked upon a policy of civilianisation of the police as vigorously as possible under the excellent chairman, Councillor Kenneth Spink. The council has done a splendid job and it is important that it should not be penalised for indulging in civilianisation. It should be praised for doing so, because it is entirely in keeping with proper and sensible Government policy.

I disagree slightly with some of my hon. Friends on the uniform business rate. The many small businesses in my constituency are finding it onerous. It is all very well for people in the north, including Lancashire, to say that it is better than the ghastly things that happened under the old rating system and loony councils in Liverpool and other places. They are certainly better off. However, the uniform business rate bites hard on people in the south and east, and they should not be neglected at times of economic difficulty.

Another issue is the ridiculous area cost adjustment system. That results in the absurd circumstance of Oxford benefiting from that system when Cambridge does not. I have never heard of anything so ridiculous. The reason is that the incredible formula is worked out not on a county basis but on some arbitrary boundaries that result in Oxford and some other parts of East Anglia being caught up in the so-called highly expensive places in the south-east and Cambridge being caught up in the not-so-expensive places. I do not know who drew up those mad boundaries, but it time that the Government looked at them.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look at this matter, because the boundaries are absurd. It is said, "Oh well, you in East Anglia and Cambridgeshire do not have very high costs." That may be true of parts of north Cambridgeshire and the northern parts of East Anglia, but it is not true of Cambridge, of the rest of my constituency or of that of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice). It is damned expensive, just as expensive as in Oxford or Hertfordshire.

Huntingdon district council, which is part of my constituency, and Cambridge council are very responsible authorities. Those councils embarked vigorously on the sale of council houses. That is an excellent policy and has given people homes of their own. It has transformed much of my constituency and those surrounding it. Those councils have accumulated a number of balances. As I have said, they are responsible local authorities which run sensible and tight ships. They do not waste money or embark upon lunatic ventures. The time has come for a release of some of that money, the retention of which I find it increasingly difficult to justify. I realise that it is not a matter entirely for my hon. Friend the Minister, but I hope that he will talk to the Treasury and the Chancellor, as I have done, as it is a way to give a much-needed stimulus to the housing market.

On balance, the Department of the Environment has done a good job on the RSG. It is a good team under my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The Department has achieved a sensible RSG in times of great difficulty. I have not heard a word from Opposition Members about how they would make it better if they were in office. I leave my hon. Friend the Minister with the message that no situation is so bad that a Labour Administration could not make it infinitely worse.

7.35 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The Secretary of State mentioned the annual ritual of these debates, and I make no apology for again attacking the standard spending assessments because of the effect that they will have on my constituency. In the past, I have attacked the level of grant that we have received and the standard spending assessment which has denied my area adequate levels of funding. Once again, my local authority is bottom of the list of 36 metropolitan districts. When we ask why we are so low, the Secretary of State says that somebody has to be at the bottom. There is no justification and no sensible argument why my local authority should receive such a low standard spending assessment. In fact, I do not think that the Government know the reason why.

The calculation of standard spending assessments defies logic. Last year, my local authority provided a report that was commissioned by Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte. It was sent to the Minister explaining why we should have a better standard spending assessment. There was no response. I am sure that all the representations from Opposition Members will meet a similar fate.

The revenue support grant is tied into the Government's calculation of total standard spending assessments. After we remove special grants from the total figures, the total SSA for 1992-93 shows a 6·7 per cent. increase. However, when we look in a little more detail, we see that the shire areas will receive 6·75 per cent., London will receive 7·84 per cent., but the metropolitan districts will receive 5·96 per cent. That is a lot lower than the average figure. Given the current level of inflation, if we compare the 1991-92 total budgets with those for 1992-93, the increase in SSAs falls to as low as 4·8 per cent. So the figure of 6·7 per cent. being bandied about by the Secretary of State is obviously wrong. The figure becomes even smaller if we consider balances and reserves that local authorities have to take into account.

Time and again my local authority has asked for changes to the SSA methodology. This year, there has been a change in methodology—an extension to cover foreign visitors and a change in relation to interest receipts. Both those changes will have no effect on my constituency and my local authority. Extensions to cover foreign visitors will probably make the position worse. The special area protection grant will be reduced by £25 per adult. Again, because of the position of my local authority, that will probably make things worse.

The SSA for Barnsley for 1992-93 is £140·74 million —an increase of 4·6 per cent—not 6·7 or 7·2 per cent. but 4·6 per cent. That is 89 per cent. of the average increase for metropolitan districts. It equates to 68 per cent. of the national increase, to 65 per cent. of the average increase for shire counties and to 55 per cent. of the increase for Westminster council, which will receive double the standard spending assessment of my authority. Why is Barnsley metropolitan borough council required to provide the same level of service as all the other authorities but with half the resources? How can that be justified? It cannot.

My metropolitan district will rank 36th out of 36. Manchester's standard spending assessment is 78 per cent. greater than that of my authority. Why does Manchester need 78 per cent. more finance to provide a standard service? Why does my authority have to do it far more cheaply than Manchester? Why is there no capping criterion for the level of SSAs when, of the 36 authorities, the one at the bottom receives 78 per cent. less than the one at the top? The Government are quick to impose a cap on budgets and to restrict the level of the council tax in relation to the bottom and top levels, but, when it comes to the SSAs, the top authority is 78 per cent. ahead of my authority which languishes at the bottom. Why is there no cap on such an expenditure level?

If we consider previous settlements of the revenue support grant, we find that, from 1991-92, there has been an increase of about 13·4 per cent. There will be a decrease in the national non-domestic rates because the rateable base has fallen. However, all in all, when one considers the RSG and the business rates, my authority will receive a net increase of 1·6 per cent. taking into account external financing. My authority will receive not 6·7 or 7 per cent. but 1·6 per cent. Bearing in mind the Government's capping criteria that allows an increase of about 4·6 per cent. on the budget for 1991-92 and gives us a capping avoidance target of £147·7 million. That will leave us £5 million short of our budget requirements to maintain the level of expenditure of this year.

It has already been said that the teachers' pay settlement will be about 5 or 6 per cent. I do not intend to go into the details of the ideas that Barnsley will have to consider for cuts. We tried that before with the Secretary of State's predecessor who complained that there would be a procession of bleeding stumps. I know darned well that that Secretary of State will ignore any information I give about cuts.

If Barnsley's SSA had been increased by the national average, we would have £3 million more to spend. If our SSA had been increased by the same amount as that of Westminster, we would have a further £5·2 million and I would not be standing here making the same speech that I made just a year ago and the year before that.

It is inevitable that there will be budget reductions and that my constituents' poll tax bills will increase by more than the rate of inflation, and this at a time when we are being denied the [illegible] funding to which we are

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entitled from the European Commission because the Government will not allow it to be additional to the 1·6 per cent. increase. The Government say that we cannot have it because of inflation and other factors, but it is additional to nothing.

Finally, I mention the South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority. In 1992-93, its SSA will be about £28·6 million, against a budget cap of £30 million. To maintain the current level of service, it would need £31·8 million. It would need £33 million for a reinstatement budget. A current service level budget means training cuts, no use of the fire service college, equipment cuts and the fire authority being 28 posts below establishment. A reinstatement budget would allow it to train officers and to have an establishment closer to Home Office minimum levels.

Let us compare South Yorkshire's fire and civil defence authority's SSA to that of other areas. Greater Manchester has received a 10·2 per cent. increase, Merseyside a 7·4 per cent. increase, Tyne and Wear 11·5 per cent., London 8 per cent., the West Midlands 7·6 per cent. and South Yorkshire 4·5 per cent.—bottom of the list again. Only South Yorkshire's fire authority has an SSA lower than the capping limits. There will be a £2·4 million shortfall between the cap and the minimum standard of fire cover. Clearly, that will lead to a poorer level of fire service provision in my constituency and, as I have said, higher poll tax bills. I again ask the Government to get rid of this stupid SSA methodology.

7.44 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Hon. Members representing Warwickshire have argued consistently for more than 12 months that the standard spending assessment formula is flawed, and I shall give the House three examples.

First, there is no reduction in the percentage of the education SSA which refers to additional educational needs. I am advised that Warwickshire county council, if able to decide for itself, would certainly not distribute 20 per cent. of its schools budget on the basis of figures produced by the 1981 census.

Secondly, the use of the current SSA formula highlights a serious difference between the Home Office and the Department of the Environment on fire service spending. Despite representations made by Warwickshire county council, there are no changes being made to the formula, which results in a gap of about 25 per cent. between the permitted SSA and the standstill expenditure on the fire service.

The SSA which is produced by the Department of the Environment's computer apparently identifies Warwickshire as an overspender, but Her Majesty's inspector of fire services has serious doubts about the service's ability to meet the operational requirements laid down by the Home Office. Therefore, it seems likely that Warwickshire county council will be making two command apearances—first, before the Home Secretary for not spending enough to ensure an adequate quality of fire service and, secondly, before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for overspending on its SSA.

The third flaw that I have identified is in anticipated revenue. In the equivalent debate last year I drew attention to the fact that there is an assumption made within the formula for the amount of anticipated revenue that the authority receives from interest on receipts. I freely admit that my right hon. and hon. Friends have made an adjustment which reduces the size of the anomaly, and I am grateful for that. However, despite that adjustment, the county does not receive the amount, and, indeed, cannot receive the amount, laid down by the SSA formula because Warwickshire county council's balances are much lower than the assumed figure. Low balances equal low revenue.

Hon. Members will be aware that counties are grouped by the Audit Commission into families. Warwickshire had the lowest revenue support grant per adult in its Audit Commission family for last year and this year. Let me illustrate that shortfall by again referring to the Audit Commission family. In 1992-93, top-of-the-pops Bedfordshire receives a massive £475 per head in revenue support grant. Bottom-of-the-league Warwickshire gets £286, a shortfall of almost £200 per head.

Earlier I referred to the discrepancy between the deemed interest and the interest actually received by the authority on its receipts. But we also have a problem with the area cost adjustment, which is known to local government buffs as the ACA. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens), who is sitting in his customary place. I acknowledge once more his hard work in seeking to obtain a sensible level of revenue support grant.

The ACA directs more than £1 billion each year to the south-east, which is not so much a brain drain as a bullion drain. It is based on general data and applies to employees whose pay is, in the main, determined not by area but by national pay scales, which apply to the midlands and to the south alike. The practical results of the ACA show that county councils in the south have standard spending assessments £200 million more than the amount that they believed it appropriate to spend in 1991-92. In other words, the lucky and favoured south-east underspends when judged by SSA. If Warwickshire could join that favoured grouping, Warwickshire's problems would be over. If that is not acceptable to my right hon. and hon. Friends—and I understand why it may not be—may I point out to my hon. Friend the Minister that there is a second possibility, advanced by the Association of County Councils, which is to abolish the area cost adjustment.

There can be little justification for the ACA when £200 million is not spent. In a table giving the increase of this year's SSA compared with the figures for the last year of the old formula of general rate expenditure, Warwickshire is second from the bottom. I suggest to my hon. Friend that, by any criterion, Warwickshire and its charge payers are suffering pretty rough justice.

Like most hon. Members, I know that there is a pretty tenuous relationship between quantity of spending and quality of service provided. In education, for example, Newham spent the second largest amount per child, but came second from the bottom in terms of results. That can be contrasted with North Yorkshire, which was fourth in results, but 81st in terms of money spent per child. I remind my right hon. and hon. Friends that Warwickshire is not socialist Newham or Brent, which are run, or have been run in the past, by left-wing Labour councillors.

Warwickshire is run by sensible, responsible, Conservative councillors who genuinely do their best for their communities.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: No, because I am limited to 10 minutes. Last year, Warwickshire was capped, but thanks to the efforts of all Warwickshire Members and to the understanding of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and of my hon. Friend the Minister, the cap was lifted by almost £3 million. That made a most significant contribution which did much to prevent draconian cuts being made in Warwickshire services. This year, Warwickshire finds itself in a broadly similar position to last year's. I shall not therefore, be able to support the Government in the Lobby. The fact that for two years running I find myself opposing the proposals may give some food for thought.

I ask that should Warwickshire set a budget marginally and reasonably above SSA—and I made this point in an intervention in the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton—my right hon. Friend will show understanding and sympathy similar to that which he showed last year. He measured that sympathy not so much in words, but in money. Similar funding will this year protect the quality of service in Warwickshire. That plea comes from Warwickshire Members. I know that my right hon. Friend has done much to help and I, like other Warwickshire Members, am grateful for that help. However, I ask him, his hon. Friends and the Department of the Environment again to consider the SSA and to devise some method of producing an SSA which is fair not only to other counties but to Warwickshire.

7.54 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): It is time that the House, the Government and the Secretary of State stopped denigrating local government. It is time that we acted like grown-up people and recognised local government for what it is and for what it does. It is time that we recognised the work, the time and the service of local councillors, and it is time that we recognised everything that has been and is done by local government. It does the House no credit wholly to denigrate local government.

I ask myself why local government is denigrated. I do not say that the Government have been allowed to carry out the principle that I am about to explain, but I must give some examples. Salazar of Portugal had to do two things to move power from local authorities to the centre: get rid of trade unions and get rid of local government. Franco in Spain had to do two things to move power to the centre: get rid of the trade unions and get rid of local government. Hitler in Germany had to do two things to move power to the centre: get rid of trade unions and denigrate local government. I do not wish to compare anything in my country with those examples, but I believe that the principle is the same. To move power to the centre, one has to make the trade unions impotent, and one starts gradually to move the power from local authorities to central Government.

Since 1979, the Government have pursued a vendetta against local government. Why? I have always said and always will say that it is central Government's duty to decide how much to give local authorities. After that, it is local government's duty, in consultation with the citizens whom it represents, to decide how much it can go above that to provide proper services. In 1979, the Government set out to cut central Government grant to local government. They thought about all the power in the Labour authorities, which they despised, and they wanted people to turn against the local authorities. That did not work, so the Government gradually brought down the revenue support grant, which meant that the local authorities put up the rates to provide the same level of services—never mind an improvement in the services.

Central Government decided that they must do something else, so they dissolved the counties because they were providing bus services which were next to none. Everybody loved the bus services, but they were being subsidised and the Conservative Government did not like that. They got rid of the counties.

The Government considered what to do next, and that is how rate capping came about. The Government realised that, although they had caused the problem for local authorities of having to ask the people for extra money, people accepted that, so they put a cap on. That meant not only that local authorities could not get money, but that they could not provide services. The Government are looking for ways in which to draw attention away from their own centralised policies, so they ask people to make local government the whipping boy. That is where we start.

My local authority has more or less managed in that period, but the Government are treating local government like the proverbial donkey, whose owner decided, in the interests of economy, not to feed it. He was very disappointed when it died just when he had got it going without giving it anything to eat. That is what central Government are doing to local government: they are trying to make it manage without anything to eat and, if they are not careful, it will die.

Given all the sacrifices that local councillors have made, I do not know how they can take what is happening—all the brickbats that have been thrown at them both by those they represent and by central Government. I shall not go into the facts and figures, because my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) has already done so. Suffice it to say that, as a result of this year's SSA, my authority will lose £5 million. We need £150 million to break even, and there is no way that we can find that money. Not only will every poll tax payer in my area have to pay a lot more; they will get fewer services.

That money can only come from what hon. Members on both sides of the House have always recognised as the two largest spending areas—social services and education. In 1974, the authority decided to embark on a rolling programme to provide nursery education throughout its area. In 1979-80, that programme had to stop: the authority had to find the money to meet its statutory obligations, so non-statutory obligations had to go. As a result, half of those living in my constituency are saying, "Hey, wait a minute; you've provided nursery education for that half of the area, so why not for this half?" My concern is that the half of my constituency that does enjoy nursery provision may find it gradually eroded because, as a non-statutory duty of the authority, its funding may have to be reconsidered.

Those are some of the problems that local government faces. In addition, further responsibilities are being placed

[Mr. Allen McKay]

on local government by central Government. Where is the funding to be found for child care, care in the community and extra education?

If this Government or any future Government, of whatever political persuasion, do not get down to examining what has happened to local government over the past few years and attempt to put it right, the problems will remain. I honestly believe that the Secretary of State recognises the problem. The problem facing him, however, is how to extricate himself from his present difficulties and save face at the same time. The time for saving face has gone. It is time to co-operate to put local government back on the pedestal where it belongs, and for the Government along with local government and local people, to find funds once again to provide services that have been lost.

The local authorities provided employment. All the little construction firms that depended on local government contracts for their survival have died because of central Government's action. Local government also provided enterprise and industrial estates. Firms have come from Japan as a result of local government enterprise. I am the first to admit that they would not have come without central Government help and that we have received central Government grant for regeneration. Having provided that assistance, the Government should not kill the area.

As the Secretary of State is here, I want to make a plea about RECHAR. The Secretary of State smiles, but let him answer my question. The unified business rate will bring to my authority an increase not of 7 per cent. but of 1·6 per cent. The poll tax will bring to it an increase of 4·6 per cent., not 7·8 per cent. The police and the teachers are to receive an increase of about 10 per cent. Where will the money come from for that? All those items of expenditure will have to be looked after. If the Secretary of State can say that RECHAR will come in, under present Government rules, in addition to the 4·6 per cent. and the 1·6 per cent., I will start to believe him. If he cannot, I shall believe the others, who say that RECHAR money will be dissipated in a way that was not intended. It is time that the matter was looked at.

8.4 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) mentioned RECHAR. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows that all of us on both sides of the House are determined that the money should be made available to the areas that we represent. My right hon. Friend and his colleagues know that I succeeded in persuading the British Government to include my constituency in the RECHAR proposal. It was with great dismay, therefore, that I learned that the Commission had removed my constituecy from the list of those seeking RECHAR help. In adition to seeking to secure RECHAR money, I hope that we shall ensure that it goes to those constituencies that need it. I place on record my dismay that the Community has removed my constituency from the proposal.

At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone said that he thought that the Government and the Secretary of State should stop knocking local government. It is pretty hard to sustain the view that the present Secretary of State has knocked local government. He has consistently sought to bolster the pillars of local government and enhance its role.

It is important to recognise that there is a strongly held view that it is the Labour party that has undermined the local government establishment. That is why many of us welcomed the strong emphasis that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State placed on the fact that there would be no amnesty for non-payers of the community charge. Like it or not, Labour Members must accept that it was the campaign by 30 or so of their number against payment that made it so much more difficult for local authorities to collect the money. The fact that non-payers have had the apparent sanction of members of the Labour party has made it that much more difficult for authorities to collect the sums.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the hon. Gentleman really suggesting that non-payment is attributable entirely to the actions of a mere handful of Labour Members of Parliament who decided that they would not pay? If so, the hon. Gentleman is giving those hon. Members powers that none of them ever believed they had. Their rejoinder would be, "Oh, that we had."

Mr. Mitchell: That is not quite what I said. I am not saying that those hon. Members were pivotal. I am saying that the campaign for non-payment by 30 or so Labour Members sent a material message to the country. It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to say that they were a mere handful; they made up more than 10 per cent. of the parliamentary Labour party. That is a large number, and they sent a clear message to the country.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Lest it should be thought that we are referring only to Labour Members of Parliament setting a bad example, will my hon. Friend confirm that, in our own county of Nottinghamshire, senior Labour members of county hall—the very people who were setting the charge—did not pay until they were the subject of court orders? That was the kind of example being set by Labour councillors throughout the country as well as by Labour Members.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend has eloquently demonstrated the truth of my remarks.

The position was even worse than that. The authorities which are determined to collect, which challenge the concept of non-payment by the use of the courts and which are successful in collecting are Conservative councils, whose record of collection is infinitely better than that of Labour councils. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) said, the Conservative councils in Nottinghamshire have been successful and determined in collecting the community charge. It is the Labour councils which levy the highest charges and which are the least successful in collecting.

Mr. Allen McKay: It is a pity that we do not have time to go into the way in which charges are made. The hon. Gentleman is doing himself a disservice both on that subject and by talking as he does about non-payment. He has not got down to the nitty-gritty of why non-payment has occurred. I should like to tell the hon. Gentleman about the people in my constituency who have had to pay the 20 per cent., but I hope that we have now got rid of that rule. Others who have not paid the poll tax are those who cannot pay. They are counselled, and the payment comes late.

Then we come to the small core of those who will not pay, and the problem is getting those people into court. The police will not serve warrants. The police have received an increase in their allocation to pay for 17 civilians because the chief police officer does not believe that his officers should waste their time serving such warrants. The increase for the police this year will simply pay for civilians to serve warrants on those who will not pay the poll tax. It is ironic that that increase will be paid for by those who have paid their poll tax.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the difficulties associated with collecting the community charge. Conservative Members would not disagree that it is difficult. However, like several of my hon. Friends, I am talking about something else—about the signals that the hon. Gentleman's colleagues have given the country about non-payment.

I turn now to the level of the settlement and to the way in which the spending assessments are determined. The settlement that has been obtained by the Department of the Environment this year seems fair and just, all in all. Of course each of us would like our own local authorities to have more money, but taking the constraints on Government into account, this seems a fair and defensible settlement.

On this as on other occasions, I have noted the points that have been made about the SSAs. When the new system was introduced, I looked hard at the SSA for my constituency of Gedling and at those for other local district councils in Nottinghamshire. I had to conclude that, by and large, the way in which the SSA was constructed was fair. I emphasise that I should like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to find more money for Gedling. We can and will spend well every penny that he provides for us.

Having considered Broxtowe, Rushcliffe, the city of Nottingham and neighbouring borough councils, I recognise that, broadly speaking, the settlement is fair. I wonder how easy it would be to start uprooting the system again. It is clear that there is logic and sense in the way in which the SSAs have been calculated around the country. I am sure that my right hon. Friend does not need me to tell him that it could be dangerous and difficult to uproot the system at this point.

It is immensely frustrating that, although local government receives funding through its own community charge precepts and from central Government allocation and grant, it for ever complains about and lays at the feet of the Government any shortfall between what it would like to do and what it can deliver because of cost constraints.

Local government must face up to the fact that it has its own revenue-raising powers and grant from central Government, from which it must meet the needs that it seeks to meet and was elected to meet. It must justify its allocation and its spending priorities.

Schools in my constituency badly need capital spending. I am relatively happy that the Government have massively increased the amount of money available for capital spending on schools this year in Nottingham, but I now look to the county council to live up to its responsibilities and to spend on those schools the amount that is required by the children who are educated in them. Some county councils continually shuffle off responsibility for their decisions and difficulties on to central Government, but in doing so they undermine local government.

We have heard today the litany that we hear in all local government debates—that the bad decisions that have been made by local government have come almost entirely from councils that are controlled by the Opposition parties. I say "parties" because I am referring also to the Liberal Democrat party which, sadly, is not at the moment represented in the Chamber. *Hansard* is littered with such examples and, in a positively brilliant speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) listed many of them.

All our local government debates have contained examples of Labour's spending in Hackney, Lambeth and Liverpool and around the country. My hon. Friends and I are driven to the irresistible conclusion that, if that is what the Labour party is like when it is in power, we have many lessons to learn about what it would be like if it were ever to form the Government at Westminster.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) has said that the Government have undermined local government but, quite apart from what I said earlier about non-payment, I put it to him that the extraordinary behaviour of some of those bizarre councils has done more to undermine local government and the respect in which central Government and local people hold local government——

Mr. Allen McKay: Again, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. His attitude to local government is set, narrow and shallow. If he thinks that the conduct of one local authority affects other local government thinking, he is wrong. Local government is an entity in its own. Its affairs never spill over its own border. That has been one of the problems of local government, not what the hon. Gentleman has referred to.

Mr. Mitchell: With respect, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The chapter of the way in which some Labour councils have behaved is well documented. That is what has done so much damage to local government.

My final point relates to the important work of the Audit Commission. All hon. Members are consumed by analysing how much money has been spent and whether more money will be made available for particular services, but we do not spend anything like enough time considering whether that money is well spent. I pay tribute to the work of the Audit Commission. It has saved billions of pounds by writing reports that are always respected and independent, and which suggest ways in which local government—and, now, the health service—can get better value for money.

The Audit Commission has examined achieving value for money in areas such as the management of the council housing stock, and has produced reports on absenteeism through sickness, on the police, on refuse collection and on schools. It has performed an outstanding service to local government and to local and national taxpayers by seeking to get more from each pound that is spent in public service. Although the citizens charter and the charter mark are an excellent extension of the other reforms that we have introduced to make local government more efficient and

[Mr. Mitchell]

responsive to the people it represents, the work and commitment of the Audit Commission are our best guarantee that that money will be well spent.

I very much regret that it appears that the Labour party's plans for the Audit Commission may water down its effectiveness by handing control to the Labour party's chums in the unions and local government. If the Audit Commission is to continue to do the work that it does so successfully for local government, and to achieve better value for money, it must be independent and impartial, and its reports and work must be respected. I very much hope that the work of the commission can be significantly extended after the general election. It could do much more work on housing associations and housing management. We must ensure that we can further benefit from the work that it performs so well.

8.18 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The feelings of the young hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) about the way in which local government has broken up were expressed subjectively and I suspect that he will not agree with me when I say that they seemed to date from about 1979—and we know what happened in 1979 when the hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was first elected. She was elected, in part, on a manifesto which said that it was her intention to take Whitehall off the backs of the town halls. That was her claim, but what followed was a complete lie in terms of the manifesto pledge.

The relationship between central and local government has deteriorated partly because a series of Conservative Administrations have continually attacked and deprived the local authorities of resources, and subsequently because of the poll tax.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo *rose*——

Mr. Banks: I shall warm to my theme and then give way to the hon. Gentleman.

When the hon. Member for Gedling mentioned the Secretary of State being a great supporter of the pillars of local government, I could not avoid a little chuckle. That reference immediately brought to mind Samson, who pulled the pillars down. The Secretary of State has indeed pulled those pillars down. I then went on to think about who had clipped Secretary of State Samson's golden locks and, once again, I realised that it was the right hon. Member for Finchley. However, he is still with us, and his contribution from the Dispatch Box was in his usual style, as if this House was not made up of Members of Parliament, but delegates, all with their blue rinses and red necks, applauding to the rafters when he makes one of his roustabout speeches to the Conservative party conference.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The hon. Gentleman is right that there was a change in 1979, but for different reasons from those he advanced. However, I do not believe that I will be able to disabuse him of his beliefs.

Prior to 1979, most local authorities were Conservative-controlled and they considered themselves to be local authorities, not Governments. When the Labour Government asked those of us in local government to exercise restraint on spending, we did it because they were the Government, and we were the local authority. After 1979 there was a marked increase in Labour-controlled local authorities and that understanding went out of the window. Consensus went out of the window, and those authorities decided locally that they were the Government and to hell with what was said in this place. That is why the Conservative party had to legislate to get done those things which were done by agreement prior to 1979.

Mr. Banks: I should like to consider that argument in some detail, but time does not permit it. However, I cannot let the hon. Gentleman get away with it altogether.

Everyone in local government would accept that central Government set the broad parameters for overall spending, which is perfectly legitimate. The hon. Gentleman spoke about a Labour Government asking for cuts to be made. It is important to remember that, then, central Government gave a rate support grant equivalent to about 60 per cent. of all local government spending. We are now talking about a rate support grant of about 42 per cent.—considerably lower. When the Labour Government called for cuts, local government spent a great deal more. The hon. Gentleman has not made his case.

The interference in local government by central Government is not just financial, but political. However, we should interfere in local government with some trepidation because local democracy and local accountability underpin parliamentary democracy and accountability. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have cut their political teeth in local government and one would expect such Conservative Members to show more loyalty towards it.

I accept that one can make some criticisms about Labour local authorities, but what I dislike about the Secretary of State's usual contribution is that it is so clichéd, simplistic and grotesque. He seems to say that Tory councils equal good, Labour councils equal bad. That does not bear any analysis. If one seeks to understand the way in which politics is gradually dragged into the gutter, it is because hon. Members come out with such a simplistic approach. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) has only just ambled into the Chamber. If he would like to sit there for a while and learn something, I will then cheerfully give way to him.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test) *rose*——

Mr. Banks: I do not normally give way to someone who has just ambled into the Chamber, but I shall make an exception on this occasion, because I rather like the hon. Gentleman's florid looks.

Mr. Hill: The hon. Gentleman cannot separate his several lives. He is unable to separate his contribution to what should be a well-informed debate from a satellite television knockabout. If the hon. Gentleman is as clever about local government as he is trying to impress us, perhaps we could hear something about local government. We know that he was a member of the Greater London council, and there are plenty of things that he could talk about. However, he is just offering us a knockabout contribution, and I do not believe that that will get the debate any further.

Mr. Banks: I am glad that I did not miss that intervention, because it has contributed so much to the debate. The hon. Gentleman, who has only just wandered in, should realise that I am responding to points raised earlier by his hon. Friends. Although he may not agree with what I have said, and what I am about to say, he should at least extend to all of us the courtesy of sitting quietly in his seat, especially if he joins us at such a late time.

There are times when I do not believe that the Secretary of State understands what is happening in local government. I know that the right hon. Gentleman gets around the country, but does he realise that it is almost impossible to maintain services in many of our local authorities? I have never known a time when central Government have interfered so much in the day-to-day running of the town halls. We should allow them to get on with their business and we should not interfere so regularly in what they do.

My hon. Friends the Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) have already mentioned the particular problems that we face in our borough. We are the second most deprived local authority area in the country according to the Department of the Environment's own indices. We have a raft of problems with which to deal and the Secretary of State should understand some of them by now.

The particular problem to which my hon. Friends have referred has arisen because we will have to pay back about £6 million, which was awarded by the rates valuation courts because of previous overpayment of rates. As my hon. Friends have said, the original calculations were made by the Inland Revenue and had nothing to do with the borough of Newham. We had a stable rate base for a long time and we saw no reason to doubt that there was anything untoward in the ratings that had been made within our borough. We now find ourselves confronting a massive pay-back.

I do not intend to say any more about this issue, which has already been referred to by my hon. Friends. However, we were received promptly and courteously by the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities yesterday when we explained the situation to him. I would not want to pre-empt any joyous, or even hopeful, news that he might tell us tonight. I would even say something nice about his new-fangled haircut if he were to say something hopeful to the London borough of Newham.

It is important to consider the wider implications of the revenue support grant settlement as it applies to all London. It appears that London is well represented tonight, but we are all from one particular borough. As chair of the London group of Labour Members of Parliament, I should like to consider the difficulties being experienced by other London boroughs.

It is the opinion of the Association of London Authorities that the level of revenue support grant does not reflect the wide diversity of problems that are faced by ALA Labour boroughs. Considerable evidence has been collected about the additional costs arising from refugees. It is known that more than 80 per cent. of refugees admitted to this country make their way to London, for many good reasons. However, the Government have effectively wiped their hands of any responsibility and have left London boroughs, essentially Labour ones such as Haringey, Newham and Islington—I accept that there are also refugees in Kensington and Chelsea—with the responsibility for those refugees and all the problems that they bring with them. Camden has calculated that the additional spending required on unaccompanied refugee children in 1992-93 will be just short of £1 million. Similar figures apply to other ALA member authorities.

London is also experiencing a great problem with homelessness. Any hon. Member who wants to go round with his eyes open will become aware of that problem quickly. An analysis conducted by the London Housing Unit has suggested that, by March 1992, and on present trends, nearly 50,000 households in London could be in temporary accommodation. The net cost of providing such temporary accommodation will be about £265 million. There is no adequate recognition of such costs in the revenue support settlement.

The Secretary of State really must address the unique problems of London. I realise that many of my hon. Friends do not have much sympathy with Members who say that, but they at least work in London and appreciate that the capital city has a series of unique problems. We do not want an unfair share of what is being handed out by the Government; we want a share that reflects the peculiar circumstances in the capital city. The changes in standard spending assessment methodology have upset a number of Labour councillors. That methodology is not fully understood. Indeed, I suppose that very few people understand it.

I want to put to the Minister of State a question about foreign visitor nights. The Association of Local Authorities is simply opposed to the inclusion of foreign visitor nights in the measure of enhanced population in respect of SSAs for other services. The rationale of using visitor nights, rather than where visitors spend their time during the day, is very questionable. Secondly, the data source is completely inadequate, being based on 1981 census data. Thirdly, the financial effect of the inclusion of foreign visitor nights is totally unfair.

I do not want to point an accusing finger at the Secretary of State. Actually, I do point an accusing finger at the Secretary of State, but not at the Minister of State, who is a decent, honourable person. I hope that, when he winds up the debate, he will say something nice about Newham. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister, having induced me to say something nice about him, betrays me at the Dispatch Box I shall take horrible revenge. However, that will come at a later debate.

When one looks at the inclusion of foreign visitor nights, one sees that Westminster, which has a Conservative authority, gains £5·3 million and that Tory Kensington and Chelsea gains £4·5 million, but that Labour Hackney loses £600,000, Islington loses £700,000, and Newham loses £700,000. One wants to know a little more about this question of overseas visitors.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): Camden?

Mr. Banks: Perhaps Camden, too, has gained—I hope so—but I shall want to know whether it has gained as much as Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea.

Then there is the matter of the Inner London education authority transitional grant. ILEA is concerned about the rapid rate of withdrawal of that grant. The reduction for 1992-93 represents more than 28 per cent. in cash terms, or one third in real terms. The authority believes that the profile of the grant should be reconsidered and that the grant for 1992-93 should be increased by at least £60 million to prevent further deterioration in education in inner London. I hope that the Minister will address that problem.

[Mr. Banks]

I come now to the elements of spending that the ALA says should be disregarded for capping purposes. Again, I put a perfectly reasonable question to the Minister. Why should not all expenditure on council tax preparation, which is not met by specific grant, be excluded? The poll tax will be very difficult to collect in 1992-93, as every hon. Member acknowledges. Many authorities face a stark choice between allocating resources to poll tax collection and enforcement and allocating resources to front-line services such as education and social services. Poll tax administration costs must be placed outside the capping level.

That seems to be a perfectly reasonable proposition. The hon. Member for Gedling referred to Members of Parliament and councillors who are not paying their poll tax. Everyone has a civic right—a civic duty, some would argue—to refuse to pay a tax that they think is peculiarly unfair. Those people must take the consequences, of course, and for many of them the consequences are dire. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields)—perhaps I cannot now refer to him and others as my hon. Friends, as they are no longer in the party——

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: They have been sacked.

Mr. Banks: Exactly. They have been sacked from the Labour party, and I expect that they will have to leave Parliament. They have paid a very high price for taking their stand. I disagree with them, as, no doubt, do most other hon. Members. However, the hon. Member for Gedling should never disparage a person who puts his job and his reputation on the line when he sees a tax or a law as grotesquely unfair. We all know that the poll tax was grotesquely unfair. That is why the Conservative Government got rid of it.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman makes a point about the civic duty of citizens. He should accept that there is a very different point to be made in respect of a Member of Parliament. Members of Parliament, having taken part in the process of making laws, cannot then break them. Two of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends may have forfeited their seats in this House. What about the other 28, who still have the sanction of the Labour party?

Mr. Banks: I have made the point that I do not agree with the stand that has been taken. I am merely trying to emphasise that those people have paid a very high price. In those circumstances, hon. Members should not be so critical of them. Indeed, the price that has been paid is one which I suspect very few other hon. Members, on either side, would be prepared to pay for a principle. That ought to be recognised.

There is much about the rest of the situation in London that I should like to comment on, but I see that many hon. Members are eager to speak, and there is no audience so unreceptive as a bunch of people waiting for someone else to sit down so that they can get up.

I have great affection for local authorities. I cut my political teeth in a local authority; I went to a local authority school; I lived in a local authority house; and I learned music in a local authority concert hall. In those circumstances I have great reverence for local authorities, which are grotesquely attacked by Conservative Members. We want to see local authority services in this country improved, but that will not be achieved by hon. Members who constantly attack and denigrate decent officers and councillors who give up their time, their jobs and all sorts of other things. Those people want to provide services, and we should make sure that they are able to do so. However, I am afraid that they will all have to wait for the election of a Labour Government before local democracy can be put back on the road.

8.37 pm

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Like the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), many Conservative Members cut their political teeth in local government. I should hate anybody to get the impression that affection for local government is the preserve of the Opposition. It is not. Many Conservative Members have spent many years in local government. One of our advantages is that we were in local government at a time when there was a Labour Government and recall how things were in those days. That is something to which I shall return in a moment.

I want to associate myself very closely with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) about the settlement for Cambridgeshire. There was some concern that Cambridgeshire, as a very fast-growing county, would not receive the SSA that it felt it needed. Needless to say, it still has not received what it feels is needed, but that is beside the point, as it never will. The SSA that the Government has awarded to Cambridgeshire under the formula is substantially higher than those of many other areas, and we believe that the county has been treated extremely well.

The Minister of State will recall that my colleagues and I met him to discuss the situation in Cambridgeshire, as did hon. Members from other counties. The points that were put to the Minister have already been enumerated, so I shall not repeat them. I should like, however, to make a brief comment on the additional area cost adjustment. It is nonsense that, on one hand, the civil service recognises the extra costs of living and working in Cambridgeshire by awarding premiums, whereas the Department of the Environment does not recognise those costs when it comes to settling grants. I very much welcome the changes in the recognition of notional interest from capital receipts. That important point was made by Cambridgeshire, and the Government have recognised and acted upon it. In the end, we have had a very good settlement.

Concern will always arise from what is known as data lag. In any fast-growing county such as Cambridgeshire, data lag is bound to be of some significance, although not as much so as some of my Cambridgeshire colleagues believe. Inevitably, any population statistics will become out of date in a growing county.

When considering that problem, one comes to the fundamental fact that any formula to distribute a central grant is bound to create problems. For one to gain from an adjustment of the formula means others losing. So, in the Government's efforts to ensure that any changes to the formula meet with the general approval of the local authority associations—a worthy desire—any change which means that the majority might lose will be vigorously opposed. Hence, any measure which tries to overcome the data lag means that those who represent areas with falling populations will oppose it.

Almost all areas in which there have been population reductions in recent years have been urban areas, often or usually represented by Labour authorities. So my constituents are still losing because urban local authorities are gaining more grant than they would be getting if the population statistics were right up to date. It will be difficult to overcome that problem. Perhaps, as a Lambeth poll tax payer, I should welcome the fact that Lambeth is getting a bit more grant than it would have got if the population statistics were absolutely up to date, but I would rather sympathise with my constituents, who to some extent still lose from the system.

That problem is not unique to SSAs: it applies to any formula used to distribute any sort of central grant. There will always be authorities which take the view that they are being ill treated by whatever formula or system is adopted, and that is exacerbated the higher the level of central grant as a proportion of total expenditure. So Labour Members who pretend that they could increase the grant—suggesting that somehow the problem would go away—are fooling themselves and the public.

I look forward to the day when education ceases to be a local authority function. I should like every school in Britain to be grant-maintained, given total responsibility for managing its own affairs. If one took away, say, 70 per cent. of expenditure, one would be left with a remnant of local authority expenditure, which would mean that the impact of whatever national formula was used for the central distribution of grant would be rapidly and considerably diminished. That would get over the annual event in which we are participating today and in which many of us—I am as guilty as any—fight our corners because of the way in which the formula has worked.

I referred to some of us cutting our teeth in local government in the 1970s. I remember, even in those days, the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), when Secretary of State, exhorting local authorities to curtail their expenditure. I recall the glorious mess that the Government of the day made in the 1970s. If they understood, even then, that we must curtail local government expenditure—that it could not just be let rip—goodness knows what the Labour party today is thinking if it believes, as it appears to believe, that we can get rid of capping, increase government grant and allow local authorities full vent to all their ambitions for expenditure.

Understandably, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) declined to answer an intervention of mine when he had clearly said, in answer to an earlier intervention, that a Labour Government would abolish the community charge forthwith. The implication was that it would be abolished during the next financial year, before its demise, already decided, on 31 March 1993. If that would be his intention, he must say how local government would be funded in the remaining 10, 11 or however many months remained of the following municipal year.

That would involve another £6 billion to £8 billion having to be paid by way of public expenditure, perhaps out of borrowing. That would be paid for not by us but by our children and their children paying back, as always, the debts incurred by Labour Governments. One might describe it as a case of the mice playing while the cat is away, in that the shadow Treasury team is not in the country just now, able to keep an eye on promises being made on behalf of the Labour party.

I largely welcome the settlement. I recognise the limitations of SSAs. The problems involved are not unique to the SSA system. They will be with us whatever mechanism is used to distribute the money that the Government of the day decide is appropriate for local authorities to have from the centre. We cannot get round that feature of the system, but the sooner the totality of local government expenditure is reduced dramatically by taking education out of it, the sooner the effect of problems in the formula will be diminished. I shall support the Government in the Lobby tonight.

8.46 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The standard spending assessment is one of two great evils of the poll tax. The first was the poll tax itself, based on a flat rate, the worst form of taxation ever introduced in a democratic society. It has not been fully removed but merely sidestepped with the introduction of the council tax.

The second evil was the method used for arriving at the standard spending assessment, meaning that in many cases the poll tax was pushed up to very high levels. That SSA remains in place as part of the council tax. So we still have with us one of the major problems that the poll tax introduced.

Much has been said about the methodology that has been used in constructing the SSA. That methodology affects no district council worse than that of North-East Derbyshire, which covers much of the constituency that I represent. Other authorities in Derbyshire are also badly affected by the operation of the SSA, as is Derbyshire county council.

It is often said that when league tables are produced somebody must finish at the bottom. North-East Derbyshire, with its areas of serious unemployment and former mining areas that are now in decline—places such as Clay Cross, which at one stage had quite a reputation in the House, Renishaw and Holmewood—has great problems requiring various types of assistance. Those areas come within North-East Derbyshire, which manages to finish in 365th position out of 366 district councils in England, with only east Dorset below it from the point of view of SSA per head of poll tax payers.

I have just received a written answer from the Department of the Environment listing the statistics; it will be in the Library. It shows North-East Derbyshire's SSA as £81 per head, with many authorities above it receiving two or three times more because of the problems in their areas. That is a vast and almost unbelievable disparity for an area such as North-East Derbyshire. An examination of the breakdown of the figures leading to the area's SSA reveals many of the difficulties.

There is another table in the Library in another answer from the Department of the Environment. It is about the distribution of the SSA: the percentage that is expected to be collected through poll tax, the percentage that comes from the business rate and the percentage that comes from the revenue support grant. Again, North-East Derbyshire is near the bottom of that league in terms of revenue support grant, but high up in terms of the amount that has to be raised in poll tax moneys in order to meet that SSA.

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

It is 13th from the top, or 13th from the bottom, whichever way one wishes to look at the list. This means that, when the two sets of figures are related, the SSA for the poll tax payers in North-East Derbyshire in terms of the grant that they receive is abysmal.

The Audit Commission has produced sets of comparative statistics for similar types of authority. North-East Derbyshire finishes at the bottom of those lists, as it finishes bottom of the lists for all the authorities in Derbyshire, although those other authorities are themselves often badly placed. This is the position for a district authority because of the four main items used in assessing the SSA. There is the enhanced population. North-East Derbyshire loses in this connection because many people move into Sheffield or Chesterfield, or for the pits to places such as Markham, for their employment and are not there during the day. That has a knock-on effect, because that figure is then used and is multiplied into other figures which are used later. A considerable loss occurs there, because the moneys that North-East Derbyshire had to provide in no way relate to the loss of those amounts. I could go through those items one by one and there are very few that have amounts associated with them that could be said to be of relevance. They are often matters of relevance to county councils but not to district authorities.

Then there are the characteristics of ward density and ward sparsity. When those two figures are added together, North-East Derbyshire manages to finish up with a smaller grant than any other authority.

The shape of North-East Derbyshire has to be looked at, along with the services that it has to provide. It defies logic that it is seen to be an ideally shaped area, the best type of make-up that could possibly be found, therefore requiring the lowest possible SSA.

In terms of the all-age social index, North-East Derbyshire falls down because it has a social mix whereby the eastern part of the district is very much a traditional working-class area and the western part is a middle-class area. That middle-class element reduces considerably the grant that is available. It is as if working-class people have to carry middle-class people on their backs.

There are other problems for North-East Derbyshire, and these have been stressed by other hon. Members. There is the problem of the RECHAR money which is not being provided. The pit closure programme continues and workshops are now to close, which affects the level of the business rate.

All this takes place in the context of Derbyshire itself. If its figures are compared, those of the last GRE with its current SSA, Derbyshire finishes at the bottom of increases for the shire counties. Yet it also has characteristics which mean that these policies should not be directed towards it. I am saying, not that a fiddle has taken place after the methodology has been established, but that the methodology produces this sort of nonsense and should be replaced.

The fraud squad has visited the council offices in North-East Derbyshire. Instead, the fraud squad should be investigating what has been done in local government finance. An ordinary, decent authority is attempting to manage on wholly inadequate resources, and if it goes only slightly beyond the SSA, it moves into the capping area. That is an unbelievable situation for the people of North-East Derbyshire. The position is similar in areas such as Chesterfield. Conservative Members such as the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) will find that their authorities are also placed in a low position. They should be pressing for higher funding and for the alteration of the formula rather than seeking to defend what is taking place.

8.55 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): None of us tries to argue that the standard spending assessment is a perfect system, but, having lived through the old rate support grant mechanism, I do not believe that there is some magic formula, given the diversity throughout the country, that will meet with universal acclaim. I believe that the SSA is a legitimate and reasonable stab at establishing what each local authority needs, or needs to spend.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), in his opening remarks, specifically targeted his comments on shire districts. Believe it or not, the city of Nottingham is only a shire district, although I hope that that will not obtain for long after the next general election. Its adult population is just under 200,000 and its total population around 270,000—so it is hardly a shire district in that sense.

In debates of this kind, Opposition Members only ever mention the amount of money districts such as the city of Nottingham get under the grant that flows from SSA or under the old rate support grant. This year the Government have given, I believe, just under £6 million direct targeted grant because we have inner-city problems. I was delighted that the city of Nottingham was successful in the city challenge. That is another £37 million over a five-year period. Those grants are in addition to the grants that arise as a result of the normal annual announcement about standard spending assessments. As they all form part of a local authority's income, which it is entitled to spend, it is wrong that those factors are ignored when we debate local government finance.

I am dismayed by the attitude of the Labour-controlled Nottinghamshire county council which, having supported the city council in its first successful bid for city grants, has now decided not to support the city council's bid for the second tranche. As the population of the city of Nottingham is almost 30 per cent. of the county's population, my colleagues and I cannot wait for the present Secretary of State to introduce, after the general election, the necessary mechanism to give us our independence once again.

My county is almost identical to other shires in that just 13 per cent. of its total net expenditure is handled by the districts and 87 per cent. is handled by the county council. In cash terms, that total represents expenditure of some £750 million, only £96 million of which is spent by the districts. Given that so much money is spent, I can understand why my constituents constantly ask where on earth it all goes. That is another reason why I wish the Bill that is currently in Committee speedy progress. It will give us the mechanism for doing away with our county council, which is the wrong structure for local government in my area.

Because local people pay such a tiny percentage of the total amount spent, there is a gearing effect if a local authority spends more than its SSA. If, for example, it spends £114 or £115 instead of £100, the charge that people will receive through letter boxes will almost double. That is a real worry. The Government are absolutely right to recognise that gearing effect and to build into the legislation a protection for the people who must pay the local bills. They are right to limit spending through their capping proposals. It is significant that, in the face of all the evidence of the adverse effect on people who cannot afford to pay extraordinarily high bills, both the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats oppose any limit on spending. Indeed, the hon. Member for Dagenham said that he can conceive of no circumstances in which the House would limit local government spending.

Another problem that worries me is local businesses, particularly small businesses. From the available figures, there is no doubt that, in my county, businesses pay 35 per cent. of the total bill through the unified business rate which, with all its faults, at least protects our local businesses from the predations of what would otherwise be an insatiable, spending Labour authority. Nationally at least, businesses have benefited from some £2 billion as a result of changing from the old system to the current one. The Labour party now says that it wants local businesses to pay a greater share of the total bill. Businesses large and small pay enough and they should beware of an incoming Labour Government—heaven forbid—because the hon. Member for Dagenham has said unequivocally that they will pay a higher ratio. That would be a disaster for all my constituents.

9.2 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I shall be brief, because I am aware of the time limit, and parochial because I was taken by some of the comments made by Conservative Members, who dragged up the hoary old myths about Liverpool. I understand that many Conservative Members are ignorant of the history of local government finance in Liverpool. I certainly understand the attitude of the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind). He reminds me of a child going down a country lane, whistling in the dark and looking for the bogeyman. The bogeyman who is coming is the electorate, because they will tumble the Conservative party.

The history of local government finance in Liverpool is simple. When the Government changed the formula for the rate support grant in 1979-80, the rate was artificially depressed thanks to a combination of opportunistic Liberals and equally opportunistic Tories on the local council who, for electoral purposes, kept the rate down.

The objective authorities agree that Liverpool was deprived of hundreds of millions of pounds in rate support grant. The words of Professor Michael Parkinson of Liverpool university are my evidence for that. Nevertheless, the unseemly local political problem of the mid-1980s occurred because of the obduracy of the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), and the equal obduracy of Militant Tendency in Liverpool, which meant that the whole city was plagued with financial hardship that we feel to this day.

I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not here, because at one time he was the Minister for Merseyside. I am told that he had a soft spot for Merseyside, but I have never heard him criticise Ministers in his Department who have abused Merseyside recently and who have maligned the good city of Liverpool.

While the authority in Liverpool has no time for the poll tax, it has struggled to stay within the law. At every stage, it has had to struggle to carry out its responsibilities, for several reasons. First, it has respect for the law if not for the actual poll tax legislation. Secondly, the authority did not intend to fall into the trap of being used as Tory propaganda and as an example of what a Labour council would do with laws that it did not like. Thirdly, the authority has a commitment to local people and local services, and it intends to defend their interests within the law.

All through the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the leaders of the council suffered tremendously—personally, politically and financially—because they upheld the law. They were attacked, physically on occasion, and maligned by people in the city with ulterior political motives and by Ministers for electoral purposes. Nevertheless, they have stayed within the law, and the authority has never been capped.

Today I got the city treasurer's report faxed to me. What does it all mean for Liverpool? In 1992-93, there will be a grand total of £16·9 million in cuts in jobs and in services. As services deteriorate, those who suffer will be the old people, the children and those least able to protect themselves—the poor, the unemployed and single parents.

I should like members of the Government to come with me to Arnot street school in my constituency, where there are two schools in one building. I have seen coping stones blown down on the floor. The money to repair the schools is not there. The council does everything it can to stay within the law and provide decent services. All it gets for its pains is abuse from the Government. Of course, the district auditor does not view the council in the same way. He sees it as a model of probity in running a public authority. Again, there is not a word from the ex-Minister for Merseyside to say, "Well done," to Liverpool city council.

Tory Members think that they can use Liverpool for their own electoral purposes, but let me remind them that, in 1979, Labour did not control Wirral council or Sefton council. There were far more Tory councillors on Liverpool council then than the miserable two Tories now. The experience of those years has been an education.

Liverpool put its house in order. It does not believe the lies and propaganda being put out by the Tory party from a position of advantage in government. Mark my words: that will show in seats in the general election in Merseyside and across the north-west. The moral is that Labour councils look after the people and that a Labour Government will look after Labour councils.

9.7 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): In Staffordshire, the council has had an increase in SSA over the last two years of no less than 25·5 per cent. By any stretch of the imagination, that is a significant increase. It comes at a time of economic difficulty throughout the country, when most businesses and households would be delighted to have had such a large increase in their income over a similar period.

Despite that massive increase in SSA to £625 million, Staffordshire claims that it cannot make ends meet. It claims that it is being treated less favourably than other counties, so the speech of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) will be helpful to me

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

because I can show it to the county council to let it see that it is not the worst off in the country. At £808 per adult, the SSA takes Staffordshire well ahead of Sussex, Surrey, Avon and many other counties in the south of England.

Members of Parliament in Staffordshire have always sought to make the case for Staffordshire to the Government when the case is good. Notwithstanding the fact that the county council is Labour-controlled, Conservative Members of Parliament have always been prepared to join in to support a good case.

However, with regard to the allocation of budgets, local democracy is alive and at work. When deciding on their budgets, local authorities—whatever the constraints imposed on them by external factors—must decide where their priorities lie. Staffordshire county council has deliberately chosen to make a saving of £7 million in the education budget so as to inflict the maximum pain on my constituents and those of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley), who I see is in her place.

The council claims that it needs a massive 10 per cent. increase in the education budget to provide the services, when we know that inflation is about 4·5 per cent. Even if one takes the highest inflation factor—teachers' pay—we are only talking about 6·5 per cent.

Like the hon. Lady, I have a child in a Staffordshire school, and my family are affected as a household. The parents in my constituency are up in arms at the decision of Staffordshire council deliberately to inflict damage on their children.

Ms. Walley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: No, I only have a couple of minutes—I was granted less time than the hon. Lady.

The cuts have not been in education spending, but reductions in the increase that the county council would like to spend. But parents do not care who is to blame; they want quality education for their children. I understand that, but when the county council chooses to increase its social services budget by 20 per cent. in cash terms, it deliberately chooses to increase social services expenditure at the expense of our children's education, which is wrong.

Ms. Walley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: No, I am sorry.

Staffordshire council has £20 million in its reserves and could use some of that money. It could make hard decisions about social services budgets. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has to make hard decisions, as do county councils, district councils, businesses and families up and down the country.

It may be that, thanks to local mangement of schools, some schools may have funds within their own budgets. However, it would be wrong were a county council to raid savings that a school had made through efficient management brought about by this Government. It would be wrong to penalise a school for being efficient.

I hope that I have been able to show my hon. Friend the Minister the deep sense of anger felt by parents in my constituency and myself as a parent of a child in a Staffordshire school at what the council is doing. It has failed to make a case to Members of Parliament to show why it should be given special treatment.

We have heard throughout today's debate from various hon. Members that some parts of the country should be given special treatment. If all those demands were to be met, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer would have to come to the Dispatch Box to announce a massive increase in taxation.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to add to the points that I have made about the treatment that Staffordshire county council has received from central Government.

9.13 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): The ill news is that the cup game between Sheffield Wednesday and Middlesbrough is currently drawn. If anyone can bring me better news, it will cheer my spirits and lift my speech.

Today's debate has very much been a mirror of the one that we had exactly a year ago on revenue support grant and standard spending assessments, even down to the oldest of all tricks—Conservative Members rightly stating that their districts have specific problems or needs and recognising that there are hard decisions to be taken by a hard Minister who positively enjoys being hard. Most people wring their hands in despair while saying no.

Conservative Members say—as they have repeated this afternoon—that Warwickshire is in a terrible plight. Last year there were even more hon. Members from Warwickshire present; perhaps some of them are out canvassing at this very moment, persuading the electorate that the Government are not responsible for the poll tax or service cuts—contradicting the county council leader and his colleagues in Warwickshire. Tonight we heard more pleading for Warwickshire, which is always followed by an assertion that that county is so needy, whereas counties under Labour control are unpleasant and unneedy—despite the fact that they find themselves in the same circumstances and confronted by the same problems.

We heard also tonight pleading for the importance of investing in Norfolk's coastal defences to prevent the sea from washing over the Norfolk countryside. We all sympathise with the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss), who evidently feels that the tide is coming in on him, and probably agree that the necessary expenditure should be free from capping. Of course coastal defences are important, but every authority has a good argument for not being capped in respect of long-term expenditure to meet essential needs.

We understood from the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth that the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) is responsible for encouraging such expenditure and providing—through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—the funds that are to be capped in the coming year, but which will then be reimbursed. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food probably knows something about the sea washing over the coastal defences in Suffolk.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal once held the ministerial post now occupied by the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), but did absolutely nothing other than to pretend that the only way to achieve ministerial preferment was to be as nasty as possible about every Labour authority going, and as unpleasant as possible about those who need public services.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal was one of the eight present members of the Cabinet responsible for the poll tax. They did not just vote for it in Cabinet but had a hand in progressing that legislation through its Committee stage and implementing it.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) found it necessary to defend his county against the view held by Warwickshire and Norfolk that Cambridgeshire has been given far too good a deal. He felt that Cambridgeshire has not done too badly, but that it could have done better. In any event, the hon. Gentleman had got it wrong because he said that my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) would abolish the poll tax the moment that Labour returns to power.

I hate to disabuse the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East, but we proposed that the poll tax should be abolished this April. The Government refused to join us in making that possible. Under another of our proposals, the 20 per cent. contribution would already have been abolished.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Labour Members did not vote for that proposal.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who has emerged from under one of the stones that she was examining at the time——

Mr. Gould: It was her political gravestone.

Mr. Blunkett: I would not wish anything as unpleasant as that on the hon. Lady—just mere defeat. The hon. Lady's memory is so short that she does not remember that we did vote on that proposal.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I remember the Opposition tabling the amendment in question, and that I spoke to it—and that the Opposition did not press it to a vote.

Mr. Blunkett: I refer to the Report stage of the Local Government Finance Bill. We remember being here, and we all remember voting on that amendment. The hon. Member for Lancaster clearly nodded off at the time——

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): There must have been a full moon.

Mr. Blunkett: —but presumably she tells her electorate that she was not responsible for maintaining the 20 per cent. contribution rule.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) says that there must have been a full moon on the night in question, but obviously it was not bright enough for the hon. Lady to find her way through the Ayes Lobby. Whatever the reason, she missed the Division. As a consequence, we are left with the 20 per cent. contribution—for, as we know, the hon. Lady's vote would have made all the difference.

Let me make it clear to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East that we cannot now abolish the poll tax, technically and practically, before April 1993. In the week running up to what will presumably be a 9 April election, everyone will receive a reminder of that on the doorstep—a bill that says, "Vote Labour in the general election." That will be the legacy of Conservative inaction.

It is, however, the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) who most needs to be reminded why we are here tonight. It is not about technical arguments concerning the intricacies of absurd indices of social need—that is, the twisted standard spending assessments; it is not even about the way in which revenue support grant has been successively reduced. It was reduced from 61 per cent. in 1979 to 49·5 per cent. in 1981, and thence to only 26·6 per cent. in the current financial year. In spending terms—in real terms—the grant is now lower than the 1981-82 allocation, even when we include the £140 reduction which, along with a £4·3 billion VAT increase, went towards trying to placate those who had suffered under the poll tax.

No; the real reason why we are here tonight is this. We are discussing how to meet the crying need that exists in our communities. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood made a comment about the increase in Staffordshire county council's social service spending for the coming year; it seemed that he had missed what his hon. Friend the Minister for Health had said about the need to spend money on solving the problem—it was agreed that there was a problem—that had arisen from the pindown affair.

Ms. Walley: Is it not wholly unacceptable that Staffordshire county council should have to find £7 million from its education budget, and an equal amount from other budgets—including its social services budget, which is now so much greater as a result of the pindown problems of the preceding financial year?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree. Successive cuts have meant that a number of authorities—including Staffordshire and Hereford and Worcester—have had to increase social service spending.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: As the hon. Gentleman may appreciate, I had to cut short my speech—partly because the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) had spoken for 20 minutes.

It is true that a substantial flaw in Staffordshire's social services department was identified; but I have never called for the resignation of the chairman of the social services committee, because I recognise that the committee had a very difficult job to do. I do not consider that it has addressed the problem of delinquent children in Staffordshire, but I am certain of one thing: we all have to make hard decisions in life, and Staffordshire county council is not exempt from that. If the council is faced with the difficult choice between dealing with delinquent children and dealing with my children and those of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley), it must get its priorities right—and I believe that it has got them wrong.

Mr. Blunkett: I, for one, am sick of hard decisions being made about the care of children in social services, or the education of children in schools. It is time for some hard decisions to be made about the country's top 5 per cent. of earners, who have made a cool £30,000 in tax cuts since the 1988 Budget. It is time to make some hard decisions about those who can afford to pay, rather than making them on the backs of those who cannot. It is time to make some hard decisions about spending on home helps. It is time to compare those who spend money on meeting needs with those who spend money on civic binges.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I draw your attention to column 22 of *Hansard* of 16 December 1991? We were discussing the 20 per cent. contribution for students and the Labour party did not put it to the vote.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): That is interesting, but it is hardly a point of order for the Chair. It has nothing to do with me.

Mr. Blunkett: On the following day, 17 December, we voted on the abolition of the 20 per cent. contribution for everybody on nil or low income. I am afraid that the hon. Member for Lancaster has scored another own goal, something that I hope that Middlesbrough will be doing right now. I remember that well, because I moved the motion and called the vote on it. I shall not argue about that any more because the facts speak for themselves.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remember that, too.

Mr. Blunkett: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We both remember it well.

The debate should be about home helps and the authorities that are spending most on home help services. We should be talking about Newham, Sunderland, Sheffield, Lambeth, Derbyshire, Leeds, Gateshead, Islington, Newcastle and Salford. Those are the top 10 Labour authorities meeting the need for home help services. The 10 lowest spenders on home help services are Surrey, East Sussex, Hampshire, West Sussex, Shropshire, Dorset, Gloucester, Isle of Wight, Bexley and Hereford.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is saying that there should be extra spending on those services. If there were a Labour Government, how much extra spending would there be, how quickly would it take place and where would it come from?

Mr. Blunkett: Those authorities have decided on their priorities and have not allowed them to be decided by the Government's capping system. It is clear that the Government have shifted the burden of providing services from a partnership between central and local government to the backs of ratepayers and now poll tax payers.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham made clear, the standard spending assessment and the revenue support grant are of the Government's making. The Government also decided to withdraw the area protection grant next year and the year after from key marginal seats such as Pendle, Hyndburn, Rossendale, York and Blackpool. The Government's decision also resulted in the £25 that will be added to the poll tax bills in those marginal seats. The Government decide the uniform business rate and are responsible for the level of non-collection and the additions that people will have to face in the coming year.

Those additions have been made worse by the delay in taking action on the problems experienced in using computer records in court. It was a deliberate action to delay action in order to be able to blame Labour councils for continuing non-collection problems. That was revealed earlier today, when the Secretary of State had the cheek to blame a hiccup in the parliamentary timetable last week for a failure to introduce a Bill that would be carried through with the Opposition's co-operation.

There are also the problems of gearing. That means that, for every 1 per cent. that an authority has to raise above the Government's standard spending criteria, it has to find 8 per cent. on its local bills.

To cap it all, we have universal capping. In the coming year, for the first time, every authority will be capped by the Government. They have capped key authorities for the past seven years and they have determined the expenditure and the raising of revenue in those authorities, but they still blame those authorities for so-called profligacy and high poll tax bills. The Government want it all ways. They blame the Labour authorities which have been capped for spending too much and then they have the cheek to claim credit for the expenditure on education and social services when they are pressed on whether the Government are interested in maintaining spending on public services.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science bangs his chest—or the nearest thing he can come to it—and says that he favours expenditure on schools. He says, "Look how much the Conservative Government have spent on education in the past 13 years." In fact, it is the Labour authorities which have spent that money and the Conservative Government who have successfully tried to prevent them spending it.

On social services, the Secretary of State for the Environment and his Minister of State are constantly bleating that they have increased the SSAs. As the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) said this afternoon, they failed to tell people that SSA increases this year were not matched by revenue support grant increases. While 23 per cent. went on SSAs on average for personal social services in the current financial year, only 1·9 per cent. went on revenue support grant increases from central Government. It is the biggest con trick that the Conservatives have ever attempted to perpetrate on the British electorate—to deceive them into believing that the Government believe in spending, while they are cutting it, and to apologise for not spending on essential need—as we have heard hon. Members do this evening—while revelling in the prospect of universal capping and blaming authorities for the consequences.

In the months ahead we shall be faced with the challenge not merely of how much the bills will be—important as that is at the beginning of April when the election takes place—but with the challenge in Conservative, Liberal and Labour-controlled authorities of trying to maintain a semblance of service for those who need it most. We shall face the challenge of ensuring that children such as mine get a fair deal in schools and for ensuring that in future——

Mr. George Howarth: The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) raised the canard that the Labour party had not voted for the 20 per cent. reduction during the various stages of the Local Government Finance Bill. I refer my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) to column 187 in *Hansard* of 17 December when we debated clause 1. Two hundred and thirty-five of my hon. Friends—including my hon. Friends the Members for Brightside and for Dagenham (Mr. Gould)—myself and the hon. Member for Lancaster voted on that subject.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I correct that? I have been challenged and the truth must out. On 16 December we debated new clause 17 tabled by Labour. It was entitled "Abolition of 20 per cent. community charge contribution and extension of community charge rebates to students from April 1992". I was prepared to vote for that, but the Opposition did not have the guts to press the issue to a vote.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Lady compounds foolishness with farce. I said a few moments ago that the day after that to which the hon. Lady referred, we had a vote on the substantive motion of the abolition of the 20 per cent. contribution. My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North mentioned that.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Oh, where is chivalry?

Mr. Blunkett: Where is chivalry? I am in favour of treating ladies with respect, but not of patronising them when they are being so foolish. Perhaps we could put an end to the silliness once and for all.

The Conservatives are responsible for their own actions. They are supposed to be responsible for knowing what they voted for. They ask the electorate to take them seriously on 9 April or on 7 May. They try to pretend that they were not responsible for the poll tax and for the £14 billion which it cost us. They try to pretend that they were not responsible for the 2·5 per cent. increase in VAT, and they try to avoid being held responsible for the misery that the poll tax has brought and for the cuts in services it has inflicted on people. They try to pretend that they do not know what cuts are taking place in education, in social services, in libraries, in transport, and in leisure. They then have the cheek to say that they did not know that a vote had taken place on the 20 per cent. contribution rule. That is compounding absolute stupidity with culpability.

If that is the level of Conservative Members, we shall have no difficulty in sweeping them aside in the general election so that we can bring common sense back to local government, sense back into services and Labour back into government.

9.35 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) decided to launch an attack on the Government for not being supportive of Liverpool. He did so at the very time when my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), the Under-Secretary of State, is with the leader of Liverpool council and the leader of the Merseyside development corporation in the United States trying to drum up investment for Liverpool and Merseyside. The Government believe in working in partnership. We are sorry if the hon. Gentleman wishes to remain outside the partnership.

During the debate, we have heard complaints about the inadequacies of the standard spending assessment in Newham, in Shropshire, in Wolverhampton, in Wigan, in Eastbourne, in Northumberland, in Calderdale, in the Isle of Wight, in Warwickshire, in Staffordshire, in Barnsley, in Langbaurgh, in Middlesbrough, in North-East Derbyshire —[HON. MEMBERS: "And Norfolk."]—and in Norfolk. That does not imply that there is any question of political bias.

The question we face is how we arrive at a fair method of distribution and what the country can afford. How right my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) was to draw attention to the question of affordability. How pitiful it was to hear not a mention from Labour Members, once again, of what the country might be able to afford. From them, we heard only that more money should be paid out here or there, with no reference to how that money should be found.

It was easy for the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) to say that nobody was in favour of the standard spending assessment. The criticisms that we have heard today reflect opposite views. Some believe that we should have a larger area cost adjustment whereas others believe that we should abolish the area cost adjustment. Some believe that we put too much emphasis on the social index, whereas others believe that the social index does not fully represent the needs of a place such as Newham, in London.

The Government have made an honest, well researched and reasoned attempt to distribute the moneys available to local authorities fairly. Let it be clear that the moneys that we distribute always need to be within an envelope—a total figure—which is what the Government deem to be affordable. Given the present circumstances, how right was my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) to point out some of the remarkable increases that have been possible. The metropolitan police authorities, for example, are getting an increase of 15·6 per cent. For education SSAs in general, the increase is 7·1 per cent. For personal social services, the increase is 7·2 per cent.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) was in some danger of misleading us in talking about the revenue support grant quantity which was increased. The amount of aggregate external finance—the amount that is made available from Government to local authorities—has risen by the same amount as the increase in the standard spending assessments.

We had welcomes for the settlement from my hon. Friends the Members for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) and for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice). I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West that we do not penalise police authorities for civilianising. If authorities indulge in civilianisation, the money that they receive can be used to provide more effective policing because, although the money is distributed among police authorities on the basis of their establishment numbers, it is there for all purposes and to cover all the work to be done by police authorities—by uniformed officers and civilians alike.

All three Newham Members spoke in the debate, and it is worth spending time replying to some of the points that they raised. Let me put the matter in context. For Newham, the increase in SSA is 11 per cent. per adult, and Newham will be able to spend £20 million above this year's budget. That represents an increase of 8·3 per cent. I understand, however, that Newham has a particular problem with the late rating adjustment.

Local authorities have always known that they would need to repay some general rates as a result of successful appeals against the 1973 list rateable values. Such repayments were a long-standing feature of the old system and, year in, year out, authorities had to budget for the repayments that they would have to make in the coming year. The amount to be repaid varied from year to year, but not usually dramatically and, by looking at the number of outstanding appeals as the old system came to an end, authorities could make a reasonable guess at the amount that they could expect to repay in 1990-91 and in succeeding years.

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

Most authorities have made provision for those repayments and now have no difficulty in meeting them. Evidently, Newham did not make such provision. We allowed that local authorities would be able to capitalise such late rating payments, but I understand that Newham has no capital receipts or credit approvals from which to cover them, so that provision is not helpful to it.

The three Newham Members came to see me yesterday and put some more arguments to me. It would be absolutely wrong of me to raise their expectations or hopes, but I will consider their arguments carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) talked about his disappointment at a difference of nearly £500,000 between the first figure that his authority was given and the final figure. I sympathise, if only because my own authority—Enfield—had a shock when it discovered a difference between the provisional figure and the final figure of £1·6 million. Whereas, for my hon. Friend's authority, the decrease represented 0·1 per cent., for my own authority it represented 0·8 per cent. I would, suggest, however that a reduction of 0·1 per cent. on a budget of more than £400 million, although disappointing, is manageable. My hon. Friend also knows that the money spent on sea defences is recoverable in the subsequent year.

Mr. Carttiss: The whole point is that the capping level can be met within this year, even though, next year, the money will be recoverable. That is the absurd state of affairs that I sought to draw to the attention of the House.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the capping will bite on this year's budget, and his local authority will have to make allowances for that.

The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) mentioned the problems of both Middlesbrough and Langbaurgh, two authorities that are overspending considerably. In the case of Middlesbrough, the capped limit is 17·3 per cent. above SSA and, in the case of Langbaurgh, it is 28·3 per cent. above SSA.

We had interesting observations on the question of Staffordshire—first from the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) and then from my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth), who, I suggest, had much the better of the argument. Staffordshire county council has been allowed to spend £39 million more. Its standard spending assessment has increased by 7·6 per cent. per adult.

In contrast to the rest of her party, the hon. Lady said that she did not think that there was anything wrong with the overall amount that was being made available to local authorities, but that she was bothered about the distribution. I believe that the overall amount that we are making available to local authorities is what the country can afford and that the distribution is fair. The amount that has been allocated to Staffordshire allows the county to make considerable increases, even if those increases fall some way short of what it had hoped, which was my hon. Friend's point.

Ms. Walley *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: No; I want to make progress and have only 15 minutes in which to reply to many hon. Members.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) spoke about the difficulties in his area. Obviously, I was sorry to hear about them. He asked particularly that the Government should be prepared to adjust the SSA from year to year. I can give him that assurance. We have two objectives which, to some extent, are in conflict. On the one hand, we want to meet the reasonable demands that are made of us, to respond to new evidence, and to adjust the SSA where that appears appropriate; but, on the other hand, we need to maintain consistency and stability in the system between one year and another.

This year that has led the Government to propose six adjustments to the methodology. One of those adjustments had been called for by the local authority associations. They wanted us to quantify not only people spending the night in an area as visitors who had their origins in Britain, but also overseas visitors who may impose extra costs on the local authorities. I was surprised to hear that the hon. Members for Dagenham and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) had some objection to that, because it seems clear that visitors do impose extra costs on local authorities and that we should do our best to measure those costs, whether the visitors are British or from overseas.

Mr. Turner: Surely the Minister understands that visitors arriving in Westminster or Wandsworth are in transit on a visit that may take them throughout the United Kingdom. The Minister and the Government have not given any recognition to all the authorities throughout the country that deal with tourists. The Government are burdening local authorities by not recognising the commitment that they have to tourism. They have again been blatantly discriminatory.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is simply not right. We take account of such people wherever they spend nights——

Mr. Turner: No, not in Wolverhampton.

Mr. Portillo: —whether in Wolverhampton or Bolton —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Portillo: The main beneficiaries of the change have been Camden and another London authority, Westminster. The standard spending assessment of Wolverhampton has increased by 6·7 per cent. per adult, so although the hon. Gentleman has been protesting, he can protest, not about cuts, but about reductions in the aspirations of his authority.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) made an excellent speech. He has devoted a tremendous amount of time and effort to the study of the standard spending assessment methodology. He must now rank as one of the experts in the House on the subject of local authority finance. He said that we need to continue to look at the SSAs, and I assure him that we shall. Last year, for example, we changed the additional amount that was put into education for special needs, varying that amount downwards, which benefited Warwickshire. This year, we have changed the distribution of the receipts of interest between counties and districts, which has been of general benefit to the counties, so Warwickshire has received benefits from the methodology changes in each of the past two years. I share my hon. Friend's great enthusiasm for being able to incorporate the results of the latest census as soon as that is possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) wanted to know what will happen about capping. This issue is obviously relevant to several local authorities. After the budgets have been set by local authorities, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will test them against his capping criteria. He will then designate local authorities for capping and will propose a capping figure for them. A local authority will have the option of either accepting that cap and setting a budget and sending out bills on the basis of it or of challenging it. If it decides to challenge the cap, it will have 28 days in which to make representations to us. Ministers will be happy to receive delegations from authorities that want to make such representations and, at the end of the consultation period, Ministers will decide whether to confirm a cap at the original level or whether, in the light of representations, to vary it. Warwickshire is obviously familiar with that procedure.

We heard a clutch of speeches by hon. Members from the north of England. My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), in a valuable speech, told us what a Labour Government would be like in action. We also heard from the hon. Members for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley). The hon. Member for Makerfield said that the Government did not take account of matters such as the rural hinterland, but he is not right. We measure things such as road length, and take account of factors such as sparsity. He said that we did not take account of social conditions, but of course we do.

Much of the debate has been about social conditions and how one measures them. What we do not do—this is where we disagree—is measure economic conditions. People such as the hon. Gentleman have said that we should measure unemployment, car ownership and other indicators of economic conditions. I can tell the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends that I am interested in pursuing that argument to see what extra costs will fall upon local authorities with different economic conditions. I am not yet convinced that such conditions impose extra costs and that there are appropriate sources of evidence and data, but I am happy to consider that argument.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) made a wide-ranging and interesting speech. He pointed out the different ways in which the Government have been able to provide help to Portsmouth. That important point goes well beyond the SSAs that we are debating today. Many authorities represented in the debate obviously receive large sums from the Government in housing allocations, in grants for inner-city development and so on.

What has come through loudly and clearly from the debate is that the Government are determined to control the amount that local authorities spend, partly because that is an important means of controlling public expenditure and partly because we owe a measure of protection to local taxpayers. The Labour party—the same is true of the Liberal Democrats as represented in the speech of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti)—has no concern whatever about local authority spending and how much it would cost local taxpayers.

The hon. Member for Dagenham naively said that local authorities believed that they had received £2 billion less in the settlement than they needed. He implied that if local authorities said that they need £2 billion he would certainly give it to them. On top of that, he described last year's settlement as manifestly inadequate. I remind the House that, in terms of last year's settlement, we are talking of an increase in the SSAs of districts of 28 per cent. and increases for the counties of 19, 20 and 21 per cent. On top of that, the hon. Gentleman stated that he would abolish the 20 per cent. contribution rule at once. The Government have said that they will abolish that rule from 1993 and have made allowance in their public expenditure plans for that to be done.

The hon. Member for Dagenham has produced a new promise to abolish that rule from the next financial year, April 1992. Therefore, he needs to account for another £500 million of expenditure, which is required for that purpose. He needs £2 billion, which he describes as the shortfall in this year's settlement, £500 million to abolish the 20 per cent. contribution rule and an unspecified amount which, presumably, is needed for him to make good the shortfall in last year's "manifestly inadequate" settlement.

Who will pay for this? In his opening speech my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State put that question, but we have had no reply. Will the £2 billion be covered by £60 on the community charge or by a penny or more in the pound on the rate of income tax? During this debate Labour Members have not said, but we all know that the situation would be very much worse than that. As was very well said by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo), the hon. Member for Dagenham was on television recently, and he was pressed about whether, in any circumstances, he would cap authorities that had overspent. He said:

> "We are opposed to capping, Let me make that quite clear."

The interviewer asked, "Whatever the circumstances?", and the hon. Gentleman replied, "Whatever the circumstances." Then the interviewer said:

> "You can't envisage putting up the rates by horrendous sums, by factors of 10 and 12 and 15—by putting them up by 100 per cent. if necessary? You will not intervene whatever they do. Let me just be clear about that."

The hon. Member for Dagenham said, "Yes." He said that he would not intervene even if the increase were to be 100 per cent.

Recently we have had very interesting evidence from Sheffield. It appears that the local authority there has set a budget that it believes would be allowed by a Labour Government. That budget involves increasing the community charge from the present £217 to £290 or £300—a rise of 40 per cent. Why does Sheffield council believe that a Labour Government would allow that? According to the *Sheffield Star*, the council believes it because Labour councillors, in confidential talks in London, have been told that

> "Neil Kinnock will allow their budget-busting plan to survive."

Mr. Blunkett: I should like to put on the record the fact that that report is claptrap. No such meeting as was suggested by the Minister on Radio 4 on Friday took place, nor was any such assurance given to any authority in Britain.

Mr. Portillo: I have been running this story for some time, and this is the first occasion on which I have heard from the hon. Gentleman any word of denial. If the hon.

[Mr. Portillo]

Gentleman knows of all the meetings that have taken place, and if he knows that the Leader of the Opposition has not been involved in these matters, I shall, of course, take his word. But this story appeared in the *Sheffield Star* on 15 January, and I have been repeating it since last Friday, yet this is the first time we have had a categorical denial from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Blunkett: We were waiting for the Minister to use it.

Mr. Portillo: I have been using it, and the hon. Gentleman has said nothing by way of denial.

In any case, the hon. Gentleman is not yet entirely off the hook. On the same Channel 4 programme, the hon. Member for Dagenham was asked about his plans for a uniform business rate. We know that the Labour party intends to give back to local authorities the setting of the business rate. That would mean a much heavier burden for business, as local authority spending is rising so fast. The interviewer said to the hon. Member for Dagenham:

> "David Blunkett said a greater proportion of local spending will have to be funded by businesses, and they will make sure that's done in the first year. How will you control that?"

The hon. Gentleman replied:

> "It may be said to you that that is what we will do. I'd like to know who was likely to say such a silly thing."

The interviewer said, "David Blunkett, your colleague." As the hon. Gentleman is keen on saying, there we have it.

Mr. Blunkett: I wish to make it clear for the record that I did not say it. "The Parliament Programme" on Channel 4 on Saturday night, on which I heard that quote, is unable to give me chapter and verse other than central office briefings.

Hon. Members: "Withdraw".

Mr. Portillo: When the hon. Member for Dagenham heard the comment attributed to the hon. Member for Brightside, he described it as "very silly".

We know that we would have higher spending from the Labour party, which would allow local authority spending to go through the roof, with the bills being paid by the community charge payer. As though that were not enough, Labour would put the bills on to the business payer as well. That is why I commend the motion to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 198.

Division No. 66] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David

Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor

Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis

Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank

Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1992-93 (House of Commons Paper No. 188), a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be approved.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the other motions relating to local government finance, pursuant to the Order [4 February].*

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) (No. 2) Report (England) (House of Commons Paper No. 190), a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be approved.

That the Population Report (England) (No. 3) (House of Commons Paper No. 189), a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be approved.

That the Special Grant Report (No. 3) (House of Commons Paper No. 191), a copy of which was laid before this House on 24th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Heseltine.]*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1991-92

CLASS XX, VOTE 1

European Community (Budget)

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken).

10.16 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): I beg to move,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £450,000,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges for civil services which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 182 of Session 1991-92.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important matter, involving a great deal of money. I understand that at the moment our net contribution is of the order of £2,800 million in a year. The motion seeks to increase our contribution by £450 milion on the basis of a vote by the European Parliament the legality of which is disputed.

My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will speak for the Government. We are grateful to him and are impressed by his ability, but my point of order to you, Mr. Speaker, is that perhaps at this time a Law Officer of the Crown should be present to explain the highly intricate legal aspects of this important issue, because a great deal of money is involved. I think that it would be for the benefit of the House if a Law Officer were present.

Mr. Speaker: What has been said will have been heard by the Deputy Chief Whip, who is on the Front Bench. We must now proceed with the debate.

Mr. Maude: As my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has just pointed out in his point of order, the supplementary estimate which is before the House relates to our contributions to the 1992 budget of the European Communities.

The estimate is needed because the European Parliament's recent adoption of the budget is open to legal question. The Council is considering its legal position, but, because of the legal uncertainties, the Government cannot at the moment treat the 1992 budget as agreed between the institutions. Therefore, for the time being, we must approach the 1992 budget and our contributions to it on the basis that the budget has not been adopted.

When a budget has not been adopted, monthly contributions are calculated on the basis of one twelfth of the last adopted budget, in this case the 1991 budget. The European Communities Act 1972 gives authority to contribute on this basis, without further parliamentary approval. The Government are therefore seeking parliamentary approval for this estimate to cover contributions in excess of those due, had a budget for 1992 not been adopted.

The procedure we have followed in presenting this estimate reflects comments by the Treasury and Civil Service Committee in a similar situation in the early 1980s. The Committee's second report in the 1981-82 Session expressed the view that the Government should refuse payment of any disputed sums unless the matter had been debated and decided by Parliament. On two subsequent occasions, in January 1985 and 1986, when we again needed estimates provision for part of our contribution, it was possible to provide the opportunity for debate before the first payment fell due, but the circumstances and timing in the present case prevented us from doing so again. Nevertheless, we are presenting the estimate as early as we can and well in advance of the normal spring round of estimates to provide the House with an early opportunity to debate the issue.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for giving way, especially so early in his remarks. For the sake of clarity, will he confirm that the disputed amount between the Parliament's budget and the Council of Ministers budget relates to £12 million of expenditure by the United Kingdom, not £450 million?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman is correct. The monthly amount that the estimate seeks authority from the House to contribute to the 1992 budget is only £1 million per month—that is the disputed amount.

In the light of its legal advice, the Council will take a view on the basis for action in the European Court. Subject to that advice, the Government will urge the Council to bring a case against the Parliament. The Commission will implement the 1992 budget adopted by the European Parliament pending the Court's judgment, which we hope will soon be available.

Mr. Marlow: I am afraid that my mind moves slowly at this time of the evening——

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): We understand that.

Mr. Marlow: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments.

As I understand it, we are being asked to vote an extra £450 million for an eventuality that may not arise, subject to a legal decision within European institutions—am I right or wrong? If I am right, why must we make a decision tonight on whether we are likely to approve the sum of £450 million? How does that sum relate to the £12 million or £1 million per month, which my hon. Friend has just agreed with the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)?

Mr. Maude: For reasons that we have previously debated in the House, the British contribution to the EC budget last year was abnormally and atypically low—about £1·2 billion. The underlying level of contribution is about £2 billion a year, so even if the budget had been as accepted by the Council of Ministers, a large sum in addition to last year's contribution would have been payable by the United Kingdom Government. Therefore, the amount in dispute, as has been said, is no more than £12 million in terms of the United Kingdom's contribution to the budget.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my hon. Friend explain what he means by the "underlying contribution" and the "atypical contribution", as it is difficult for us to understand?

Mr. Maude: That simply reflects an average taken over the years. For a variety of reasons, last year's abatement was substantially larger than that of the year before and that for this coming year.

Mr. Budgen: Why should we regard the average as the underlying figure? As I understand it, there is an heroic new role for the EC. More especially, we are hoping—as I imagine the House is, as it is in favour of the gradual move towards a common currency—a vast expansion of the regional fund. Why should we expect that the average should be the underlying figure? If we wish to be at the heart of Europe, we must expect a vast increase in our contribution to that heroic enterprise.

Mr. Maude: We expect no such thing. We do not base our contribution for the coming year simply on the extrapolation and average of previous levels, but on the calculation, already available, of what the contribution will be in the coming year. Although my hon. Friend may prefer to think of it as such, it is not simply a shot in the dark.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): What is my hon. Friend's latest estimate of our net contribution in 1992, assuming its legality? Does he agree with the famous Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report, which stated in paragraph 12:

"If this situation"—

which the Committee thought was unsatisfactory and unprecedented—

"arose again, the Government should refuse payment"?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend is right to refer to that report, which stated that, if a payment were to be made, this was the procedure that we should observe. This is not a new departure. The same procedure was used on occasions in the past, apart from those to which the report referred—such as in 1985 and 1986, when comparable circumstances arose.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): We are asked to approve a vote of £450 million. The "Supply Estimates 1991-92 Class XX Net Contributions to European Community Institutions" baldly presents a figure of £450 million. The only explanation offered is:

"Payments . . . resulting from the adoption by the European Parliament of a larger Budget for 1992 than that permitted by Community legislation."

We are now told that the figure amounts to approximately £1 million a month, or £12 million a year.

The motion asks for a sum of £450 million. Is the information I quoted all that the House is entitled to have, coupled with my hon. Friend's explanation—which was not at all clear? Are we talking about £12 million or £450 million? Will my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary explain why we are asked to authorise a payment of £450 million?

Mr. Maude: That sum represents the difference between our contribution last year on the basis of the 1991 budget and our contribution this year on the basis of the agreed 1992 budget. Even if the budget agreed by the Council of Ministers had been adopted, it was only slightly smaller than that adopted by the European Parliament. The bulk of the £450 million to which the estimate refers is attributable to not just the purportedly illegal portion on which the European parliament voted but the operation of the United Kingdom's abatement this year, compared with last year.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): A number of us are rather simple when it comes to such matters, as my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary knows. Is the sum of £450 million the total increase over last year in spending for the 12

[Mr. Tony Favell]

months on which we are now embarking? Is it an extra £450 million for the whole of the year, or will there be more on top of that?

Mr. Maude: No. The United Kingdom's contribution this year, as we made clear in the budget debate before Christmas, is likely to be in the region of £2·5 billion. That compares with a contribution last year in the region of £1·2 billion. Last year's contribution was abnormally low, and compared with a contribution in 1990 of close to £3 billion—which was abnormally high.

This year's contribution not only reflects an average but is, as it happens, close to the underlying average level of contribution over the years.

Mr. Budgen: My hon. Friend has performed according to the highest traditions of his old professions at the Bar, by obscuring in a very difficult case. I refer him to page 8 of the "Supply Estimates". Does he agree with the description of the payments concerned as

> "Payments to the European Communities resulting from the adoption by the European Parliament of a larger Budget for 1992 than that permitted by Community legislation"?

If he agrees that we are giving authority to an illegal budget—a vast overspend—does he not also agree that that is somewhat unwise?

In the bad old days, when we were trying to achieve a balanced budget—and when our previous leader was trying to get back "her money", as she was vulgar enough to call it—we were quite keen to reduce Community expenditure. If, late at night, we agree to illegal overspending by the EEC, will we not seriously undermine the Treasury's endeavours to prevent the same from happening in the future?

My hon. Friend has been defending the Government's position in rather the same way as a highly intelligent barrister defending a very crooked fraudster. Let me sum up my two points. First, does he agree with the description given on page 8? Secondly, does he agree that it would be extremely stupid to take such action if we are to try to reduce Community expenditure in the future?

Mr. Maude: It is always a pleasure to listen to my hon. Friend when he is trying to be helpful. His intervention is much appreciated.

I concede that the passage on page 8 could have been more happily phrased; but it is wrong to interpret it as meaning that the whole £450 million flows from the disputed element of the budget.

Mr. Budgen: What words would the Financial Secretary use?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend has invited me to redraft the passage while I am on my feet making a speech. I shall certainly have a look at it.

My hon. Friend has asked me to contemplate a further point, and I am very ready to do that, too. He suggests that the wording undermines the Treasury's endeavours to contain Community spending. I do not believe that it does. I should point out that this is not just a United Kingdom concern; the entire Council is unanimous, and, if the case is sustainable, we shall seek to challenge the budget in the European Court of Justice. That is the right course to adopt.

We no more undermine our desire to contain Community spending—which, I should tell my hon. Friend, is as intense now as it has ever been—by adopting the measures that I invite the House to adopt tonight than we did in 1985 and 1986, in comparable circumstances. In both those years, the Government invited the House to agree a supplementary estimate in very much the same terms.

Mr. Budgen: But not for an illegal budget.

Mr. Maude: The budget was in dispute, and was not capable of being treated as having been agreed between the institutions in the way to which the European Communities Act refers. On that occasion, the Government invited the House to accept the course that is being suggested tonight.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way: he is being extremely courteous this evening.

A couple of minutes ago, my hon. Friend said that the level of our net contribution to the Community last year—cash out of pocket per citizen—was about £25. This year, he says, it will be an extra £25. In other words, every family of four in my constituency will be asked to provide the European Community with a free handout of an extra hundred quid. What will they get for that extra hundred quid—and what do I tell them when they come to me and say, "Look, Mr. Marlow, we read our newspapers and find that European money in Italy is being fraudulently misapplied, it is ending up in the pockets of the Mafia, and you are asking us for another hundred quid, with all the other bills that we have to pay"? What does my hon. Friend think I should tell my constituents?

Mr. Maude: I am confident that my hon. Friend is resourceful enough to think of an adequate reply without my assistance.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) negotiated in 1984 an abatement that is permanently in existence in Community law and can be changed only by unanimity. We have no intention of allowing it to be changed. Over the years, that has saved the British taxpayer large amounts of money that would otherwise have gone to the European Community budget in the form of an ever greater net contribution. The existence of the Fontainebleau abatements means that the amount that we contribute net to the budget, while still substantially larger than is acceptable to the House, is a good deal smaller than it would otherwise have been.

Mr. Dykes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to someone who, unlike some previous speakers, has an objective view of these matters. My hon. Friend is a financial spokesman for a Government, who, for whatever reasons, have gone from an original expectation of no deficit or borrowing requirement to a huge deficit and a borrowing requirement of, probably, £25 million. That is a factor about which my colleagues who are against the Community have made no complaint and which they have accepted with equanimity.

Given that, could not the Financial Secretary defend the technical difficulties facing the Government with more robust energy? My hon. Friend does not have to apologise to anybody when he is talking about a mistake that represents 7 per cent. of the contingency reserve, which is an accidental aberration anyway.

Mr. Maude: I appreciate that my hon. Friend is seeking to be helpful. However, even when the British public finances were in substantial surplus, we remained equally concerned to ensure that the EC budget and our contribution to it were constrained.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The hon. Gentleman knows that the Government have continually expressed concern about expenditure being out of control in the Common Market. What sort of signal will this proposal send to the Common Market, which is still under heavy criticism for its excessive, not to say lavish, expenditure on, for example, the common agricultural policy? Will it not take this as a further signal that the Government are not concerned about scrutiny of financial expenditure?

Mr. Maude: I do not believe that it will send that signal. There is nothing revolutionary or new in the approach that the Government are advising the House to take. This has been done before, and we preserve the legal position. If the budget is being illegally adopted, the place for that to be set right is in the European Court of Justice. That is where the Council will take the case——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Maude: I am conscious that, when we debated the budget before Christmas, I was criticised for taking up too much time with my opening speech. I do not want to be subject to the same criticism tonight, and I hope that the House will recognise that most of the time has not been taken up by me.

Mr. Budgen: My hon. Friend——

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are there not two sides in the House? Although this debate is vastly entertaining and instructive, is it merely an internal party or family affair —or can members of the Opposition also join in?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The Minister has already said that he does not want to take too much of the House's time in what is a fairly short debate. He has already been very generous in giving way.

Mr. Budgen *rose*——

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a very important point, and we want to pin it down. If we do not pin it down now, it will not be pinned down tonight.

Mr. Budgen: May I make a final attempt to pin the Minister down?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the Minister giving way?

Mr. Maude: Yes.

Mr. Budgen: My hon. Friend refers to previous years in which there has been a dispute between the United Kingdom—I assume that we are still allowed to refer to the "United Kingdom"—and our masters in the European Community. My recollection is that, on previous occasions, there was a dispute about the necessity for discretionary areas of expenditure, especially in relation to agriculture.

There is a sharp distinction between that and what is set out in the supplementary estimates, which is illegal overspending. Will my hon. Friend confirm that, in previous years when there was a dispute, there was no suggestion that the EC was illegally overspending and that, therefore, today's debate is about something quite different? We are being asked to give parliamentary support for expenditure which, as stated on page 8, is greater than that "permitted by Community legislation".

Mr. Maude: I do not believe that we are asking the House to underpin an illegal arrangement. The right way to contest that budget, if it is found to be illegal, is in the Court and that is what the Council of Ministers will seek to do. When a budget has not been agreed between the institutions, arrangements have always been made to allow payments to be made in any event. That is the course that the Government are inviting the House to follow.

Mr. Leighton: Bearing in mind the fact that many of the member states pay nothing in net terms, can the Minister explain why he uses the curious phrase that more than £1·2 billion is an abnormally low figure? He is telling us, I think, that we have to pay another £450 million this year. What exactly shall we get in return for that money? As we are one of the poorer nations of the Community, why are we not a net beneficiary? Is it not true that we are paying more money into the Community budget to subsidise nations richer than ourselves than we give in aid to the third world? Does that make much sense?

Mr. Maude: We have discussed these matters before, so the hon. Gentleman knows that the amount that we pay in net contributions to the budget is substantially less today than it would have been had we not had to renegotiate a much better arrangement than that which we inherited in 1979.

Mr. Leighton *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but he should acknowledge that the arrangements negotiated by the previous Labour Government were extremely disadvantageous to the United Kingdom. It took my right hon. Friend's negotiations year after year to improve the position which leaves the contribution as relatively limited as it is, although it remains unsatisfactorily large.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): We understand the Minister's problem although he is arguing a very poor case with his usual great charm and expediency. If it is true that the proposal may be illegal and we shall have to go to the Court, why the hell do we not wait to learn what the Court says? If it is ruled to be illegal, surely we would get the money back. The other lot, when they were in power, did not do a very good job of ensuring that we saved money, but it seems odd to most of us to argue that, because we have done a wonderful job, we are happy to make an illegal payment. To help with his problems, I suggest to the Minister that he withdraws the motion until we find out whether it is a legal or illegal payment. Is that not a helpful and sensible suggestion?

Mr. Maude: I am deluged with helpful suggestions tonight, and I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for making yet another. My hon. Friend put his finger on the point. If the budget is eventually found to be illegal, it is perfectly possible—indeed, it would happen automatically —for the disputed amount of £1 million per month to be recouped as a matter of course. There is no problem about that. I stress to the House that the position of the United

[Mr. Maude]

Kingdom Government and their net contribution to the EC budget is not prejudiced by the supplementary estimate which I invite the House to adopt tonight.

Mr. Haynes: I hope that the Financial Secretary will listen. The Government have their hands in our pockets again. Is it true that the Government have to bring expenditure to the House for approval first? Will the Minister nod to that? Is it true that any Government expenditure has to be approved by the House?

Mr. Maude *indicated assent.*

Mr. Haynes: The Minister agrees. Now we are getting somewhere. The point is that, in Europe, they have got it all wrong, and they have made a cock-up of the job. Now the Minister comes to the House for an additional £450 million because the European budget has already been approved. The Minister is here again because they made a cock-up over there. I will have to go back and tell my constituents that the Government have got their hands in their pockets again.

Mr. Maude: It is not the Government who have their hands in the hon. Gentleman's constituents' pockets. It is the European Community financial arrangements which were negotiated with such skill by the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported in the late 1970s. I have to——

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not a Member of the House at that time, and I do not know what the Minister is talking about. Please call him to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Maude: For the avoidance of doubt, I concede freely that the hon. Gentleman was not then a Member of the House, although I recollect that he sought unsuccessfully to become a Member. In support——

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not a candidate until 1979. The Minister has got it wrong again. He gets it wrong all the time. Please pull him up, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Maude: I had not appreciated that the hon. Gentleman joined the Labour party so late in life. He has been a very welcome member of it ever since.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Maude: I am conscious that the House wishes to proceed. I have given way in the course of this speech more than I have given way in all my other speeches in the House since I became a Minister. I cannot be accused of treating the House with discourtesy.

The interjections in the speech by my hon. Friends and by other hon. Members have enabled me to set out the case fully. On the basis of those arguments, I invite the House to approve the supplementary estimates.

10.48 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) drew attention to the Government's description of the motion on page 8 of the supplementary estimates booklet. That description refers to

> "Payments to the European Communities resulting from the adoption by the European Parliament of a larger Budget for 1992 than that permitted by Community legislation."

The figure of £450 million is attached. If that were an accurate description of the situation, it would be a matter of great seriousness to the House. We would be talking about a total of almost £500 million for a budget that appeared to be illegal. However, that is not the situation that faces us. The Government's description is at best inaccurate and it is certainly misleading.

First, in making the European Community budget, the European Parliament cannot and does not act alone. The Parliament and the Council of Ministers acting together form the budgetary authority in the European Community. The Parliament took its most recent decision on the budget on 12 December. It is perhaps worth noting that, when the budgetary committee of the European Parliament met on 9 December, the two Conservative representatives on that committee—Mr. Kellett-Bowman and Mr. Simpson—both voted in favour of the Parliament's budget. It is also worth noting that, when the budget went to the full European Parliament three days later, 29 Conservative Members of the European Parliament voted in favour of the budget.

Mr. Budgen: Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that there is a clear conflict of interest between Conservative Members of the European Parliament and Conservative Members of Parliament? Quite honourably, the MEPs have sworn their allegiance to a supranational federal structure to which they wish to give enhanced power and extra expenditure. It is naïve to pretend that those who vote for extra expenditure in the European Parliament have the same views or the same interests as Members of this House.

Mr. Smith: I was under the obviously mistaken impression that the Conservative party that the MEPs represented was the same as the Conservative party that the hon. Gentleman represents.

The budgetary process, which is a matter for Parliament and the Council of Ministers, has not yet run its full course. As the Minister was forced to admit by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark), it is perfectly open to the Government to argue within the Council of Ministers for a challenge, through the European Court, to the budget that the Parliament decided on 12 December. The deadline for taking such a challenge to the European Court is 19 February. It is up to the Government and the Council of Ministers to decide whether they wish to mount such a challenge, and they have two more weeks in which to make that decision.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman said that I was forced to admit that it was open to the Council of Ministers to do that—not a bit of it. I owned up to it perfectly freely—indeed, it is not a question of owning up or admitting to it; I set it before the House. It is clearly the case and there is no secret or anything startling about it.

Mr. Smith: If it is, indeed, clearly the case, we must ask why on earth the motion and the supplementary estimates are before us today. The motion is totally unnecessary if the Council of Ministers is still making a decision about whether to go to the European Court—as it did two years ago—in a process that is a perfectly normal part of the budget-making process. If that is so, it would be wrong to describe the present state of the budget as illegal and it is unnecessary to bring the motion before us. The Government have got the procedure about face.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford) *rose*——

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill).

Mr. Hill: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy. I understand that the rules of the European Parliament have been the same for many years in that the Parliament has the ability to vary the budget that is presented to it by about 6 per cent. Of course, that can be challenged, which is where the difficulty is beginning to arise. At the moment, there is no approved budget and the supplementary £450 million is a contingency amount to enable the Community to be able to pay its wages and to keep the Community going. The European Parliament is in a strong position against the Council of Ministers and perhaps even the Commission. The money is needed until the difficulties are sorted out either by the law courts in Luxembourg or by the Council of Ministers giving way.

Mr. Smith: As happened two years ago, it would have been far more sensible to mount a challenge in the courts if the Council of Ministers felt that appropriate and for the disputed elements in the budget—to which I shall come in a moment, because it is worth taking a look at the subject of the dispute—to be effectively frozen and for everything else to be released while the dispute was resolved by the courts. That would have been the sensible procedure, but I am afraid that that is not the way that the Government or Council of Ministers chose.

Mr. Budgen *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman and will not do so now because I should like to make progress and——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I shall give way for the last time to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Spearing: Referring to the answer that he has just given, is my hon. Friend aware of the 1982 recommendations of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service when the next such occasion arose when, whether or not it was sensible, the procedure that the Government have now adopted—however well explained or unexplained—was recommended? That is why they are doing it now.

Mr. Smith: I believe that the Government have adopted an unnecessary and incorrect procedure, which has certainly not been well explained. My hon. Friend will be aware that the 1982 Select Committee report has already been mentioned. Instead of the Government's rushing to the House with a supplementary estimate vote, it would have been more sensible to ensure that the matter was sorted out in the normal budgetary procedure.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I shall give way to the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, but must then make progress because other hon. Members want to participate.

Mr. Higgins: The purpose of the Select Committee's recommendation at that time was that the House should have an opportunity to debate and consider the matter before the money was handed over. That seemed a sensible arrangement. If we were to proceed as the hon. Gentleman has just suggested and the court case were to go against us, we would be liable for penal rates of interest. The overall effect on our finances would thereby be worsened. That is why that is not a sensible way of proceeding.

Mr. Smith: I follow the right hon. Gentleman about the need to ensure that the House has the opportunity to debate these matters. It is perfectly open to the Government to ensure that that takes place at any stage of the budgetary process. We had our all-too-brief debate on the budget a couple of months ago. As on several other occasions, I should certainly endorse greater openness and parliamentary accountability about what our Ministers get up to in the Council of Ministers.

The first point to bear in mind is that I believe that the procedure we are undertaking tonight is unnecessary.

Mr. Budgen *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I shall not give way because of the pressure of time.

The second point is that the increases in the budget, voted by the European Parliament in December, are within the financial perspective for 1992—a financial perspective endorsed and agreed by this Government some years ago.

The 1992 budget, as voted by the Parliament, also represents 1·11 per cent. of Community gross national product, which is 0·09 per cent. below the upper limit of EC expenditure set when the financial perspective was agreed four years ago.

It began to emerge from what the Financial Secretary said that the figure of £450 million is somewhat misleading. The dispute between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers relates to a far smaller figure than the £450 million British contribution that is before us. The Financial Secretary accepted that, on the Government's own admission, we are talking about an actual difference—an actual dispute—of £12 million for the year.

The root cause of the difference lies with the Foreign Ministers of the Community. Some time ago they decided, collectively, that it would be a good idea if the EC made available substantial sums of additional aid to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. They recommended amounts including 860 million ecu in aid for the former Soviet Union and the countries of eastern Europe, 300 million ecu for humanitarian aid, 300 million ecu to bring the structural funds into line with the real rate of inflation and other sums for the tropical rain forests.

The Council of Ministers included those amounts in the budget. However, in recompense for adding those amounts, it said that it did not agree with some of the items that the European Parliament had included in the draft budget. Those items included an appropriation for improving the early-warning system relating to trends in

[Mr. Smith]

agricultural expenditure—an extremely important monitoring measure in which the Government should be interested—and appropriations for research and development expenditure at a level commensurate with the agreements reached between the Parliament and the Commission.

The dispute is about additions to the budget for eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, which the Council of Ministers wants to include in the budget, and amounts, principally for expenditure on research and development, which the European Parliament wants to include in the budget.

I have nothing against improving our aid profile to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. We all know how important that task is and how strongly the Prime Minister has endorsed it in recent weeks. However, I do not believe that that should take place at the expense of research and development assistance, which our country desperately needs. In fact, Britain receives the lion's share of such expenditure by the EC. We are a net beneficiary of EC funds in terms of reserch and development rather than a net contributor. The Government's proposal would wish upon us a lower amount of such expenditure than would otherwise have been the case. The motion is not only unnecessary but, if the Council of Ministers had its way, it would reduce desperately needed research and development funds.

I want to turn very briefly to the related, but not directly associated, issue of additionality. This concerns European Community budget moneys that we are in danger of being unable to use because of the fact that the Government refuse to accept the rules of procedure. At risk are potential grants of £114 million, under the RECHAR programme, to the coalfield areas of this country, as well as amounts under other regional investment programmes. The dispute is a simple one. It is between the Commission and the Government. The Commission points to article 9 of regulation 4253/88, which states that the money under the regional fund must have

"a genuine additional economic impact in the regions concerned."

Mr. Cash: Is anyone listening?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman asks whether anyone is listening. In the coalfield communities of this country, there are many many hundreds of thousands of people for whom this issue is extremely important. As a direct result of the Government's activity and their refusal to abide by the rules, which they endorsed when they agreed the directive, we are losing a large amount in regional investment funds.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am confident that the hon. Gentleman's point is not directly relevant to this issue. However, may I ask whether it is not the case that Mr. Bruce Millan, the Commissioner, endorsed these very proposals when he was a Minister?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a point for debate, rather than a point of order.

Mr. Smith: We are addressing ourselves to the European Community budget. It seems to me that it is extremely relevant that we should look at funds that are in the budget and ought to be available to the coalfield areas of this country but are not reaching them. I realise that Conservative Members may not like to hear about additionality and about the RECHAR programme. I realise that they may not want to hear about what the Government's activity is denying us.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is this debate about the entire Community budget or strictly about this supplementary estimate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is certainly about the supplementary estimate, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will address his remarks to that matter.

Mr. Smith: Indeed, I am doing just that. I am addressing my remarks to the £450 million that the Government say should be included. Some of that money goes to the regional funds, which are the subject if the additionality dispute. It is entirely in order to raise this matter, which gives rise to very considerable concern. The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) parrots the Secretary of State for the Environment. What he has said is a total misrepresentation of the truth. The rules on additionality came into effect only in 1988. That happened because our Government sat down with the other Governments and agreed that they should come into effect.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I recall that, when I was in office in Northern Ireland in 1988, the principle of additionality then applied to moneys that were sought to be given by the Commission for the benefit of Northern Ireland, so I am not sure of the history to which the hon. Gentleman is referring.

As the hon. Gentleman has mentioned the coalfields and has introduced that matter into this narrow debate, may I ask whether he is suggesting that the Government should deduct from the £450 million the money that the Commission is withholding from this country? Would he support the Government if that were the proposal?

Mr. Smith: I was referring—had the hon. Gentleman been listening he might have noticed—to regulation 4253/88 passed by the Council of Ministers, including Ministers representing the British Government. I want to ensure that the British Government put enough openness and transparency into the system of regional aid and the RECHAR programme so that our coalfields can get access to the funds due to them. The Government are at fault in ensuring that the money does not come to the coalfield communities, and attempts by the hon. Member for Stafford and various Ministers, including the Secretary of State for the Environment, to say otherwise are nothing short of deliberately misleading.

The Secretary of State for the Environment in 1989, commenting that the structural funds were to be almost doubled over five years, added that, without the principle of additionality, Community funding would become a farce. In 1989, he endorsed the principle of additionality, as had the Government in 1988, but now the Government are refusing to accept the rules that they helped to make. It is about time that the Government changed their approach and made sure that funds that are needed in the coalfield communities of this country reach the places that need them. If they are not prepared to do that, they should give up and make way for a Labour Government to take office, and we will ensure that it happens.

11.11 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I beg to move,

That Class XX, Vote 1 be reduced by £100,000.

I ask the House to support a brief and narrow amendment simply expressing our concern about the direction of policy that the Government are proposing, our outrage at the waste of money by the EC, and the total lack of control.

In considering whether we are being told exactly how things stand, I appeal to the Financial Secretary to examine page 2 as well as page 8 of the estimates. Whereas we know that this is the result of an unlawful budget, page 2 talks not about £1 million or £10 million but says that the estimates increase spending by £450 million to £166,431,002,000. So basically it says that, as a result of what we are doing tonight, the estimates are being increased to that specified sum.

But even if we say that that does not matter—even if we save just tuppence—I plead with hon. Members, before deciding on this issue, to consider what happened in 1982 when the same situation arose. The report of the Select Committee at that time said that a precedent was being created. Having said that it considered it to be an unsatisfactory precedent, it recommended that, if it ever happened again, we should not pay the disputed sum.

That is the only issue before the House tonight. Is it right for Parliament to authorise payment for something that is unlawful? If local councillors did what was unlawful and exceeded their budget, they would be individually surcharged. On the same basis, hon. Members who tonight support what is proposed should be surcharged in the sum of £1 million. They would then think twice before lending their support, for I doubt whether many could afford such a surcharge. If a business firm were to spend money illegally, its members could be put in prison. When we consider the hardships suffered by many people in the country today, are we right to vote money illegally?

Mr. Marlow: Opposition Front-Bench Members have suggested that the Government may not, with the other members of the Council of Ministers, challenge this illegal budget. Does my hon. Friend know whether this illegal budget will be challenged, and what is his reaction to that?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I do not know. The same thing happened last time and the Committee asked why our Government did not challenge it. What is the point of saying that we will wait until the Twelve do so? Who are the Twelve? Are they all countries that are paying in money? We know that until recently Britain paid in and Germany paid in, and everybody else took out. Where is the financial control there? Where is the great desire to ensure that there is not extra or illegal spending?

Mr. Budgen: May not my hon. Friend be out of touch with the more progressive and on-going attitude of our party at the present time? As I understand it, we now most of all desire to be at the heart of Europe. Surely that must mean that from time to time we simply lie down and give in to any illegal demands. Would anything else not be completely out of kilter with the modern desire to be friendly to everybody and to avoid confrontation? Surely consensus politics demands that we simply hand the money over. That is what has been done in a large number of other areas, and it would be monstrous not to do the same in relation to Europe.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am sorry, but I cannot agree with my hon. Friend. I think that if Europe is to be a progressive, forward-looking entity it must have the same principle as we had in the House of Commons—that money is paid out only if it is legally justified, if Parliament authorises it. We do not pay it out and say that we will see if we can get it back later.

It has been suggested that the amount is small. The Minister knows that that is a load of rubbish. Let us look at what happened in November 1987. Labour Members who attend all these debates faithfully will remember it. The previous Prime Minister said that we would make sure that we had strict budgetary controls. She said that we would give them lots of extra money and then the same thing could never happen again. And what happened? They overspent wildly by having a metric year of 10 months, with 12 months of income and 10 months of spending. There was a massive overspend. If hon. Members apply the metric principle to their own balance sheets, they will find that they do very well indeed.

We were told what happened last time. A person called Mr. Spreckley, who works for the Treasury, gave evidence. He said:

> "As the Lord Privy Seal said at the time of his statement, it would have been preferable had everybody agreed not to pay these disputed sums."

Does Parliament want to make illegal payment or does it not? That is the only issue.

Mr. Allason: Would my hon. Friend care to speculate on exactly how the European Community can spend this money if it is not authorised to do so by the European Parliament? As I understand it, we are being asked now to make a payment which will be a part of the illegal budget. How will the Community be able to receive it and to spend it?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I can tell my hon. Friend that it is because, sadly, as he well knows, there are accountancy fiddles daily within the European Community. He knows that what happened in 1988 was a fiddle and a fraud. All hon. Members know it.

We should consider this simple issue: is it right, when the Select Committee told us in 1982 that we should not do it again, that we should not pay the money until there is a full debate?

Any hon. Member who believes in democracy must agree that it is a disgrace and an outrage that we are discussing this vital issue at this time of night, when nobody will know about it, nobody will listen and no one will hear about it. It is a disgrace that all the dirty things to do with Europe, all the scandals of Europe, all the wastes and frauds of Europe, are always discussed here at the dead of night so that people outside do not know what is going on.

Mr. Favell: Has it occurred to my hon. Friend that the winter Olympics will open next weekend? The draft general budget for 1992, which we are discussing today, refers to a second report by the ad hoc committee on a People's Europe, which relates to an appropriation of some £8 million. It then says:

> "This appropriation is intended to cover expenditure on financing certain public relations projects in connection with a major Community presence at the 1992 Olympic Games in Albertville and Barcelona, in particular participation in the opening and closing ceremonies and action to underpin the

[Mr. Favell]

> Community identity of athletes from the Member States. To this end, the European Community flag will be used, particularly during the presentation of medals."

That is to cost £8 million. The Community has already spent £700,000, on the world student games in Sheffield in July on what became known in Sheffield as "Europe Day". If my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East watched the rugby world cup, he will have seen that every time a player threw a ball in, a European flag appeared behind him. Unfortunately, I have been unable to discover how much that cost, but the advertising agent assures me that the Community was the patron.

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend is quite right, and hon. Members should be concerned about that. They should not smile about it because it is a waste of money.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Teddy Taylor: No, certainly not.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who is always so conscientious, will confirm that the EC has just given Essex county council a grant to assist it in dealing with the problems created by Essex boy and Essex girl jokes. Furthermore, the EC has paid 170 million lira to a mafia-controlled firm for delivering non-existent fruit juice to NATO headquarters in Palermo, and it cannot get the money back. Ultimately, those who care about cash, especially hon. Members from Northern Ireland who know about poverty because they see so much of it, will be concerned that we should not waste money.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Teddy Taylor: Certainly not.

There are one or two fanatics around whom we should disregard. One or two of the Euromugs, including the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), give us the same old drivel every time. They say that the Common Market is wonderful and should be given more money to spend. The realists are concerned about people's problems. The time has come for the House of Commons to make a stand and say that we are fed up with fraud, waste and the European Community spending money that it is not authorised to spend.

My hon. Friend the Minister has said that we should not bother about the matter too much because the paper does not really mean what it says. Although this expensive paper produced by the Treasury says that an extra £450 million is wanted to pay for an illegal budget, my hon. Friend says that it does not really mean that. Although it says that it will put up the Government estimates by £450 million to £166,431,002,000, my hon. Friend says that it does not really mean that. We are fed up to the teeth with this because we know that people are suffering from it. Money matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is always present during these debates because he is concerned about protecting people's interests. He was telling me what that £450 million will mean. For every pensioner on housing benefit, it will mean £5 a week, which is a lot of money. So we are not talking about silly amounts.

We should bear in mind that, when this happened before, a Select Committee told us that next time it happens we should not be mugs and pay it but should just say no. It told us that if the Community wants Britain to pay for illegal money, we should let it take us to court. The Council of Ministers should be aware that, if that matter goes to the European Court, we might win. The majority of the members of that Council are being paid cash for being in the EC. The time has come to say no.

We have tabled a modest amendment. It does not seek to scrap the motion or wreck the Government's policy——

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): We have been trying to do that for years.

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend is right.

We say to the moderate Members who feel that something is wrong and should be put right that they should vote in favour of reducing the payment by £100,000. Let us give that to the poor and to the places which need help. In other words, we are not suggesting that the Conservative party or the Labour party should stand on its head. We simply say that we are fed up to the teeth with the waste and extravagance throughout Europe, and with the fact that expenditure is not controlled.

At the end of the day, the House of Commons should not be asked to pay for unlawful money. That is what we are being asked to do tonight. When that last happened, hon. Members will remember, a chap called King Charles had his head chopped off. The time has come for someone's head to roll. We have to stand firm.

There are not many hon. Members present. By having the debate late at night, the Government have made sure that the public will not hear about it. We have to stand firm. I appeal to the Labour Members who are always here —the decent, conscientious people who fight for the interests of their country—and to Conservative Members too to remember that democracy is more important than party politics. Therefore, I appeal to the House to make a gesture by voting for the modest amendment. In that way the House will say that the time has come to say no, and it will give a warning that it is fed up.

11.25 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The Financial Secretary sought to give the impression that somehow the post-Fontainebleau arrangements negotiated by the Government were superior to those negotiated by the Labour Government. He is nodding his head. The system of payments that existed between 1972 and the Fontainebleau agreement of 1984 was negotiated by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) when the country acceded to the treaty of Rome. From 1972 to 1984 that was the system. From 1972 to 1977 there was a five-year transitional period. It was only in 1978 that the system of full payments came in.

There was an election in 1979. It took the Government five years to reach the Fontainebleau agreement. I make no complaint about that and pay tribute to the Government for doing so, but the Financial Secretary should not give the impression that somehow the system that the Conservative Government negotiated was better than that negotiated by the Labour Government.

Mr. Maude: I simply remind the right hon. Gentleman of what the Labour Government said at the time, which was that they had renegotiated the arrangements.

Mr. Davies: They were never renegotiated.

May I make another point to the hon. Gentleman? Apparently some of the payments will be in respect of a possible illegal budget. This is not the first time that has happened. In 1978 there was a possible illegal budget exactly like this one, but the Labour Government did not come to the House and seek approval to pay money over while a dispute was going on. We stopped the cheque. By doing so, we got agreement fairly quickly. Stopping the cheque concentrates the mind, especially of the Commission. The Government should not pay the money. That would lead to the dispute being resolved quickly. The Government should not seek approval to pay money in respect of what could be an illegal budget.

Let us consider the Fontainebleau agreement. Despite that agreement, the United Kingdom is still the second largest net contributor to the budget. There are only two net contributors, year in, year out—Germany and Britain. It is no good the Minister shaking his head. France sometimes becomes a net contributor; the following year it probably is not. Next year we will contribute £2·45 billion to the Community budget. Yet in terms of the per capita GDP, the wealth of the country, we rank below Luxembourg, Germany, France, Italy, Denmark and probably Holland. Despite that, we are the second major net contributor to the budget. Despite Fontainebleau, we are in the same relative position as we were before that agreement.

There must be something wrong with such a system, and we know what it is. We import more, we consume more and the common agricultural policy does not benefit us because we do not receive the payments because of the size and structure of our agricultural sector.

Some people fondly believe that if we could reform the CAP we would pay less. This is not the place to debate the MacSharry proposals—I do not understand them all—but, having read them cursorily, I do not think that we would pay less even if the CAP were reformed under the MacSharry proposals. I do not believe that it will ever be reformed from inside, but if it were there would be large redundancy payments to the smaller farmers of Europe. The motor car workers who return home at night and milk a few cows will receive redundancy payments under the MacSharry plan, whereas the official farmers will be thrown to the market place and will not receive payments. To think that a reform of the CAP, should it ever take place, would reduce our contribution is to live in cloud cuckoo land.

It was suggested that if we could convert the CAP so that it withered away and became a sort of common regional policy, we would benefit. I am not sure about that. The Maastricht agreement contains a section dealing with "social cohesion"—I think that that is the latest phrase to be in vogue in the Community. As I understand it, the infrastructure fund is paid to member states in which the gross domestic product per head of population is below that of the Community average—£100. The rate for the United Kingdom is more than £100, countries with below average rates are Southern Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Therefore, even the new common regional policy will not benefit us, despite the fact that GDP per head in Wales is £85—or £87 last year—in Scotland the figure hovers around £100, for the north of England the figure is below £100 and in the west midlands it is below £100, as it is in the north-west. Even that attempt at social cohesion does not benefit a country such as the United Kingdom in which the GDP per head is higher than the Community average.

I do not know how we shall benefit from any of the systems, yet we must do so. If we move towards economic and monetary union, the countries and regions on the Community's fringes—such as Wales, the north-west and the south-west—will suffer from the concentration and centralisation of a common currency.

Next year, we will repay £2·5 billion—a not abnormally high amount—in public expenditure. That money could be used for hospitals, schools, research and development—which my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) rightly said was important. That money will go across the exchanges to the undemocratic, bureaucratic institution and we shall never get it back. I do not believe that that institution will ever be reformed from the inside. The only hope—and it may be vain—is that changes in Europe and the enlargement of the Community will bring down the whole, silly edifice. The sooner that that happens, the better.

11.33 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On the issue of additionality, it should be known that there is a constant fight between the Treasury and Ministers heading their Departments. Today I spoke to the Minister who is in charge of agriculture in Northern Ireland. He told me that he was fighting for moneys that his Department should receive, and that the Treasury was holding them up.

I believe that money from Europe that is earmarked for a specific job in a certain district in the United Kingdom should be additional money used for that purpose. Many schemes, such as the Spede scheme in Northern Ireland, are suffering at present, whereas those benefiting from the system in the Irish republic are using that power and money to undercut our economy. They already have their money. All sorts of additional moneys should be coming to us, and we should try to settle that issue once and for all.

If any Department had presented this estimate with such a degree of misrepresentation and falsehoods, the Minister involved would have been hounded out of the House. The Financial Secretary says that the House has not been given an accurate account of the provision for which it is asked to vote. We were given all sorts of explanations. Some tell us that we are voting for only £1 million a month, and others that the figure might be the whole £450 million. The House should know exactly how much it is being asked to pay.

The Financial Secretary nodded when the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) asked whether the consent of the House was required. When the hon. Member for Ashfield said,

"The Government have their hands in our pockets again",

the Minister replied, "I do not have my hands in your pockets, but Europe does." It is the Minister's business to get Europe's hands out of the nation's pockets, because they are the hands of a thief. They are the hands of a law-breaker. They are the hands of a criminal. It is the Financial Secretary's duty to stop Europe's criminal practices.

I am asked as a Member of the House to vote on something that is not permitted by Community legislation. Let us admit that. If that is so, how can a Minister who believes in law and order ask the House to vote for something that is illegal? I say to the Financial Secretary

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

that if he wants to impress Europe he must take the action suggested by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), and tell Europe, "We're not giving you the money. Go to the courts and ask for the money. If the courts of Europe say that we have to pay, we will consider it again." He should promise not to pay, but only to reconsider. That is the attitude that the Minister should adopt.

Mr. Cash: In view of my hon. Friend's extremely effective speech, does he consider that we ought to refer the matter to the Privileges Committee or to the Chairman of Ways and Means? If the House, even on the Government's own admission, is expected to make an illegal payment of as little, comparatively speaking, as £12 million—let alone £450 million on the Order Paper—that should be investigated by the House. We cannot be an engine of fraud. If the issue were referred to the courts, they would decide against the House. Does not my hon. Friend seriously consider having the matter thoroughly investigated—and not merely at this time of night?

Rev. Ian Paisley: Anything that could stop a law-breaker should be employed. That is what we are saying in Northern Ireland. We should take steps to stop the law-breakers—and we have deliberate law-breaking here. It is for the Minister to take Europe's hand—and I trust that he has a supremely tough hand of his own—and say, "So far and no further." The House must make its view absolutely clear.

If Europe gets away with it this time, it will do it again. Instead of a sum of £12 million, it could be £120 million, and so on. Let us stop it now. It rests with the Financial Secretary to stand up—and be an Oliver Cromwell, I was going to say—and decapitate the law-breaker.

Mr. Moate: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On several occasions this evening—including the Financial Secretary's statement—it has been stated that the motion is wrong. The Financial Secretary said explicitly that we were discussing a sum of £12 million; the motion refers to £450 million. The Financial Secretary said that it could have been more happily worded—which is a euphemistic way of saying that it is wrong.

Surely, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have heard enough to realise that the House is being asked to pass a motion that has been admitted to be incorrect. Surely that cannot be permissible. What powers have you to urge the Government either to withdraw the motion, or to have it amended by manuscript amendment now, so that the House can at least be asked to deal with a motion that is correct and honest?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That matter was raised with Mr. Speaker yesterday on a point of order. Mr. Speaker ruled that the motions were in order, and that if they were found in due course to be illegal, it would be a matter for the courts. That ruling is on the record, and I cannot add to it or subtract from it.

Mr. Moate: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate your ruling, but, with respect, I am making a rather different point. It does not concern the question of legality; it simply concerns the accuracy of the motion. The motion suggests that the whole £450 million relates to illegal payments, but the Financial Secretary has made it clear that the illegal payment is just £12 million. The motion is admittedly wrong; surely it should be withdrawn or ruled out of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for debate; it is not a point of order.

Mr. Marlow: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have dealt with the point of order; and it was dealt with by Mr. Speaker yesterday. There is very little time left.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As we have been told, we are discussing an illegal budget—an illegal payment. Can we somehow be given legal advice by a Law Officer of the Crown about the implications of the House conniving at an illegal payment—conniving at fraud? The House has agreed to pay money that is illegal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are debating a matter that is in order. Hon. Members are perfectly entitled, when the time comes very shortly, to vote against it if they so desire. We would not be debating the matter if it were not in order.

Mr. Budgen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Surely there is a specifically legal point involved in advising the House about our rights in relation to the institutions of the European Community. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, with his distinguished background as an Old Bailey criminal lawyer, was most effective in defending the Government in support of fraudulent activities; but surely it would not be unkind or impertinent to him to demand something rather distinguished in the way of advice from the Attorney-General. He says that there are many important manifestations of the federal law of the EEC that are unknown to the House. We should like to know our chances of preventing the payments by going through the no doubt very splendid procedures of the European Court. Until we have the Attorney-General's advice, we are in the dark.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may be in time to tempt the Financial Secretary to rise, but he certainly will not tempt me.

11.43 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): It seems to me that the question is not about illegality, but about whether or not the budget is legal. In a powerful speech, the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) put his finger on the point. We are now discussing political power and authority—the power of a person and, in the end, of the House. By tabling a motion on Friday, which unfortunately I did not see because I was not here, the Government have restricted our debate to an hour and a half. That is wrong. The Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which has produced reports on this matter, has not spoken. He should have been able to make a contribution. Also, for all his qualities, the Financial Secretary did not really explain what is going on. It would have been better if the Government had presented a document in the form of a White Paper to explain the background before the debate took place.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): That is unreasonable.

Mr. Spearing: In this Parliament, we want explanations from our Government before the debate starts. We have not had that, and that is why we will force a Division. The traditional way of showing dissatisfaction with the activities of a Government or their proposals that have not been properly debated is to move a motion suggesting a token reduction in the amount involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said that, technically, that might make some reduction in this, that or the other. However, everybody knows that, when we used to table motions about reductions of salaries or of a vote, it was a protest.

We have not had proper procedural debates on this topic. The Government have not provided sufficient information, and there is confusion over whether the sum is £12 million or £450 million, not to mention the £1,000 million of contingency vote that is mentioned elsewhere but to which no hon. Member has referred. Given all that, hon. Members should feel justified in voting for the amendment as a token of their dissatisfaction at the way in which the House has been treated.

I hope that the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee will have a few seconds to address the House.

11.46 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): I have only a few seconds. Can the Financial Secretary confirm that it is the Government's intention to oppose the illegal budget? Can he confirm that, if we go along with the estimate and win, the money will be returned to us by one means or another, perhaps by withholding VAT payments?

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Questions necessary to dispose of the motions relating to supplementary estimates 1991-92 and estimates 1992-93, pursuant to the Order yesterday.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Budgen *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can the Financial Secretary briefly answer the questions put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins)? Do the Government intend to oppose this illegal——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have put the Question and we are now proceeding to a Division. I cannot allow any further debate.

Sir Teddy Taylor *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nobody shouted, "No." We did not hear anyone shout, "No."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not want any confusion. I put the Question on the amendment of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). To be completely clear, I shall put the Question again.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Marlow *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is general agreement in the House that the first time you put the Question a strong Aye was given, but there was no contrary indication, no "No".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have been through this process twice now. It was wholly clear to me that there were both Ayes and Noes, and we are now proceeding to a Division. *[Interruption.]* Order. There can be no further points of order.

Mr. Marlow *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that the proceedings of this House are recorded. If it transpires on that recording that there was no No given the first time you put the Question, is not the second time you put the Question invalid, and does not the amendment therefore pass without a Division? The evidence is there and the matter can be checked.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House knows the procedures very well. I have already put the Question on the amendment of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), and we are now proceeding to vote on that amendment.

Mr. Marlow *(seated and covered):* Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Question to be put a second time when the amendment was passed without demur on the first occasion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are now proceeding to a Division. *[Interruption.]* Order. There are no further points of order.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock) *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to proceed to a Division when there were no Noes when you first put the Question?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall take no further points of order until the Division is completed.

The House having divided: Ayes 27, Noes 220.

Division No. 67] **[11.46 pm**

AYES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beggs, Roy
Body, Sir Richard
Budgen, Nicholas
Cash, William
Conway, Derek
Cryer, Bob
Dover, Den
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Janman, Tim
Kilfedder, James
Leighton, Ron
McCrea, Rev William
Marlow, Tony
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Teddy Taylor and
Mr. Jonathan Aitken.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew

Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dunn, Bob
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David

Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Nicol
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian

Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen

Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 223, Noes 16.

Division No. 68] **[12 midnight**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dunn, Bob
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David

Fallon, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*

Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David

Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Nicol
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Body, Sir Richard
Budgen, Nicholas
Cash, William
Dover, Den
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Janman, Tim
McCrea, Rev William
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James

Paisley, Rev Ian
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £450,000,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges for civil services which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 182 of Session 1991-92.

ESTIMATES 1992-93 (VOTE ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That a further sum not exceeding £1,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 1993, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 183 of Session 1991-92.—*[Mr. Maude.]*

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions by the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. David Mellor, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. John Maples and Mr. Frank Maude.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (NO. 2) BILL

Mr. Francis Maude accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 1992 and 1993: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time this day and to be printed. [Bill 60.]

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the few moments at the end of the debate when I was speaking I referred to something that I thought had been said by my hon. Friend for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright). I want to make it absolutely clear that I mistook what he said. He suggested that I introduce the point of conciliation, but I thought that he said something else. Therefore, if anything I said, or the manner in which I said it, reflected upon my hon. Friend, it was completely wrong and my fault.

Can you confirm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the matter before us could have been debated until any hour but for the fact that the Government tabled a motion last night and no hon. Member, including any member of the official Opposition, objected to its being taken then by simply saying "Object?" Had that happened, we would have been able to debate this important matter until everyone who wished to speak had had the opportunity to do so. If you can confirm that, does that not show the unwisdom of the Government, or anyone else, in discussing matters relating to European Community finance on what is, in effect, a guillotine?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, he has, with his characteristic courtesy, set the record straight concerning the comments of the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright). On his second point, I should say that the debate was governed by the order of the House, which was agreed yesterday, that the debate should last one and half hours, and no more.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Matter of education in Wales, the Welsh Grand Committee have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet; and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), the second such sitting shall not commence before Four o'clock nor continue after the Committee has considered the Matter for two hours at that sitting.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

PETITION

Roads (Leicester)

12.15 am

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I wish to present a petition on behalf of Mr. Mick Jones of Evington, Mr. John Thomas of Thurnby Lodge and Mary Draycott of Coleman, in my constituency, and Mr. John Henwood of Oadby. They have collected 112 signatures against the proposed eastern district distributor road and the A46/A47 link road.

As the House will know, there have been many debates, and many petitions have been presented on behalf of local people who are opposed to the road's going through the eastern part of the city. The desire is that the quality of life of people in Leicester should not be affected by this absurd proposal.

The petition ends with these words:

> Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the Secretary of State for Transport to refuse to grant permission for these roads to be built and the new alternatives be put forward for consideration to direct the traffic well outside the residential areas.
>
> And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

This is the first of a number of petitions that I shall be presenting to the House on behalf of local residents opposed to this road.

To lie upon the Table.

Staffordshire Regiment

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I understand that hon. Members other than the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) may seek to intervene. I should remind the House that the Adjournment debate is, as it were, the property of the Member who has it and of the Minister who is replying. Interventions can take place only with the agreement of the hon. Member and the Minister.

12.16 am

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I am glad to have this opportunity to raise again the case of the Staffordshire Regiment and its proposed amalgamation. The matter raises serious and substantive issues which have evoked deep concern among right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, many of whom—particularly those from Staffordshire—are here tonight. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who will reply to the debate, and to hon. Members on both sides of the House who, by their presence here after midnight, are demonstrating their anxiety about the amalgamation. As the Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton), will be aware, there is immense concern amongst my constituents and those of all hon. Members from Staffordshire and the west midlands and, indeed, Cheshire about the proposed amalgamation.

Soon after 23 July 1991, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made a statement to the House outlining the shape of regimental amalgamations, a campaign to save the Staffordshire Regiment was initiated by the Save Our Staffords campaign committee. The strength of feeling about the unreasonableness of the amalgamation was amply demonstrated when, in October, I and other hon. Members presented to Mr. Speaker a petition containing almost 100,000 signatures from the people of Staffordshire and the west midlands. Tonight right hon. and hon. Members are once again demonstrating their support for a review of the rationale for the proposed amalgamation of the Staffordshire Regiment.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has on numerous occasions said that it is not possible to reconsider the proposed amalgamations or justify them, even when the rationale appears to be far from clear.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does not my hon. Friend agree that a political decision was taken to preserve the Royal Welch Fusiliers without any amalgamation and to amalgamate the Staffords with the Cheshires, and that that was plainly in breach of the undertaking that was given to the Staffords when the North Staffords and the South Staffords amalgamated in 1959?

The House now requires a proper explanation of the political decisions that were taken. It is plainly unsatisfactory for the Minister who made those decisions, and who appears before the House to justify them, simply to say, "It wasn't me, guv; the Army Board decided this." He is the person responsible and if a political decision has been taken, it is for him to explain it and justify it.

Mr. Cash: I agree with my hon. Friend, and that is precisely why we were dissatisfied with the answers that were given, as shown on television, when the Minister was cross-examined by the Select Committee on Defence, the report of which is due soon.

The Staffordshire Regiment has already been amalgamated once since the second world war; it was not recommended for re-amalgamation by the Colonel Commandant of the Prince of Wales Division—an important factor; it meets every criterion laid down by the Army Board for retention, when many regiments do not; and it was never given the opportunity to put its case to the Army Board, when others were. I should welcome my hon. Friend's comments on those issues, should he feel able to discuss them tonight. I suspect that he may not be willing to do so.

Mr. Budgen: Why not?

Mr. Cash: That is a matter for the Minister when he replies. It is not acceptable for him or his officials to hide behind the pretext that, because decisions on amalgamations have now been made, they cannot be considered because that would open a Pandora's box and lead to every regiment clamouring for a review of its case.

Mr. Nicol Stephen (Kincardine and Deeside): I support the hon. Gentleman's campaign. Is he aware that there is equally strong feeling in Scotland about the amalgamations of the infantry battalions there, that all-party support has been given to the campaign to save the Scottish battalions and that we, too, are awaiting an explanation of the military rationale for the cuts? No such explanation has so far been given, and it appears that the cuts have been made purely for financial reasons.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that the Adjournment is related to the future of the Staffordshire Regiment.

Mr. Cash: Just because a decision might have been ill-judged and might prove embarrassing to review is insufficient reason to refuse to review it. In any event, I draw the attention of the House to other aspects of the case for the amalgamation of the Staffordshire Regiment that do not make sense, politically or militarily.

My right hon. Friend has said frequently that he supports the regimental system. This amalgamation, which would combine people from Liverpool with those from the midlands, demonstrates no social, historical or regional communality. As one who lives north of Watford, I do not believe that those who made the decision have the faintest idea that that is a real problem.

I come to the issue of regional representation. In an interview with Severin Carrell of *The Scotsman* on 27 January of this year, my right hon. Friend said that it would not be "politically acceptable" to have a large number of regiments in one part of the United Kingdom and fewer in another. I agree. I agree also with his contention that

> "there is demand from the people of the United Kingdom that they should have local regiments to join."

Where then is the political or military rationale for retaining six English infantry regiments north of the Humber-Merseyside line, some of which are struggling to recruit, and only two in the huge population area and recruitment reservoir of the midlands? Pooling the two regiments into one will not only reduce pride in and commitment to them; it will reduce the prospects for recruitment when employment patterns change.

The Secretary of State and the Minister of State for the Armed Forces have said that, because there will be fewer regiments, those that remain will be better able to be recruited at full strength. "Smaller is better" have been the watchwords, but how can this be so when some recruiting areas, judged by the published demographic projections, can always be expected to experience greater difficulties than others in maintaining their peacetime establishments?

Let me take the example of the King's Division, where published demographic data strongly suggest that it will not be possible to sustain the number of infantry regiments located in the area. I understand that the King's Division recently asked the Scottish Division for 100 soldiers to make up its strength in anticipation of a tour of duty in Northern Ireland. Since the King's Division cannot meet its recruiting targets, what possible justification can there be for sacrificing the Staffordshire Regiment on the altar of amalgamation when demographic projections show clearly the Staffords' huge and largely untapped recruiting potential for infantry, particularly in the core recruiting age group of 16 to 24-year-olds?

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): It is quite clear from the speech that my hon. Friend is making that feelings run very high in Staffordshire. Is he aware that feelings run just as high in Cheshire about this proposed amalgamation?

Mr. Cash: I am indeed, and I have heard the same thing. After all, my own constituency virtually borders on Cheshire and there is absolutely no question about the feelings in both counties. I will go further and say that when the Cheshires were asked which regiments they would want to amalgamate with they put the Staffords at the bottom of the list. That is not a very good recipe for harmony.

I put it to my right hon. Friend that insufficient time —this is important—was made available in those last 36 hours for the many balances and nuances to be adequately weighed and discussed. The result is that the infantry will be overstretched to an even greater degree. The result is, too, that the Staffordshire Regiment has been unfairly singled out for amalgamation, despite the fact that it met the Army Board's own criteria, which should have militated against its amalgamation.

"Options for Change" crucially failed to take account of the unexpected, as I said in a previous debate. To be fair, who, in June or July last year, could have been expected to anticipate the abortive putsch in the old USSR, that country's subsequent collapse and the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States? Who could have expected the upsurge of violence in Northern Ireland or the request for a United Nations peacekeeping force in Yugoslavia, or what remains of it? And all this is in addition to any commitment we may have to the advanced rapid reaction corps. The uncertainties in this situation, the instability and volatility in Europe and elsewhere in the world speak for themselves.

I understand that in a recent letter my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence wrote to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs regarding the Staffordshire Regiment in the following terms:

> "the excellent work done by the Regiment in the Gulf is not forgotten."

I truly trust that it is not.

[Mr. Cash]

It would be a tragedy if the Staffordshire Regiment were to be re-amalgamated at a time when other regiments have not been amalgamated once since 1945, when the regiment has an outstanding record of service to the county and to the country, when its recruitment and retention are good, when demographic trends show clearly its sustainability, while other regiments' demographic projections do not, and when the geography and regional representation arguments simply do not stand up to examination.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the crux of his very excellent argument is that both the Staffordshire Regiment and the Cheshire Regiment entirely meet the criteria of the Army Board for retention as they are, while many regiments that have remained unamalgamated and unmerged do not meet those criteria, and that is the unfairness of the situation?

Mr. Cash: That indeed is the case, combined with the total inadequacy of consultation before the decision was taken.

Mr. Budgen: It is all very well talking about fairness, but a political decision was taken and, therefore, the politicians ought to explain it.

Mr. Cash: Indeed, we shall wait to hear what the Minister has to say.

I urge the Minister to consider the fact that the Staffordshire Regiment was never given the chance to put its case to the Army Board, because of a breakdown in the military hierarchy. That is where the problem lies. I also urge my right hon. Friend, in the strongest possible terms, to look again at the rationale for the amalgamation.

12.30 am

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman have the agreement of the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to make a speech?

Mr. George: Yes, Sir.

I thank the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) for allowing me to intervene. I speak on behalf of my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) and for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) and many thousands of people in Staffordshire, the west midlands and Cheshire.

My objections to "Options for Change" and to the enforced merger of the Cheshire and Staffordshire Regiments are many. The reduction to 116,000 and 38 infantry battalions is absurd and dangerous. Overstretch is inevitable, especially as a result of our commitments in Northern Ireland. In one crisis some years ago, there were a dozen infantry battalions in Belfast alone and only 36 will now be available for Northern Ireland.

Was our leadership of the rapid reaction corps gained on a false prospectus? Will NATO be happy with the double hatting of the rapid reaction corps and forces engaged in Belfast and Belize? Will we keep control of the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps?

The Ministry of Defence has got the threat analysis wrong. How long will it be before that folly is exposed? The Treasury smoking gun is visible for all who wish to see it. Why should an analysis of security be determined by the Treasury rather than the Ministry of Defence?

The key question is whether an Army of the size proposed by the Government will prove sufficient in peacetime, let alone crisis and war. I am certain that it will not. The method by which the Army Board and Ministers chose the regiments for merger was shameful, and was exacerbated by their wilful refusal, in public and in private, to give the Defence Select Committee, the Staffordshire Regiment and hon. Members an opportunity to understand why they were chosen. It is an issue not of national security but of politics. Why do not the Government come clean and tell us why the regiments were merged? Silence will prove more costly to them in the long run.

The decision to merge the Staffordshire and Cheshire Regiments is bizarre and has not been explained. The Minister hopes that the issue will go away, but it will not. I guarantee that it will return to haunt him, his colleagues and the members of the Army Board who endorsed it.

12.33 am

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) on securing this debate. I am well aware of his close interest in this subject and that he has argued diligently on behalf of the Staffordshire Regiment.

The House will be aware of the background to the Army restructuring under which the Staffordshire and Cheshire Regiments will merge in 1993. It is important that the necessity for this restructuring should be fully understood and I make no apologies for repeating some of the many points which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and I have made before in this House.

The past two years have seen radical changes in the European security environment, where the scale of conventional forces now facing the west has declined significantly. It was against that backdrop that what has now become widely known as the "Options for Change" exercise was born.

Forty years of peace under NATO demonstrated that the security of the United Kingdom is best served by maintaining effective national forces as part of a powerful alliance. With the collapse of the Warsaw pact and the withdrawal from eastern Europe of forces of the former Soviet Union, the risks of conflict have changed. Europe no longer faces such a threat from massive forces able to move forward across a wide front in a matter of days. But there remain political and economic changes in Europe and continuing turbulence in the middle east and elsewhere.

I am aware that many believe that those events call into question the small size of the reductions announced. Others argue for even smaller forces. The Government have taken full account of all those considerations and cannot agree with either those who say that the cuts are too great or those whose enthusiasm for cuts in defence would leave the nation without effective armed forces. I must emphasise that our plans were developed with a considerable degree of caution in recognition that the future course of events, in Europe and elsewhere, is still far from certain and that dangerous instabilities continue to exist. The hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) made that point. We will be vigilant and, as always, keep our force levels and force structures under review. That said, only a major change in future commitments, requiring additional long-term deployments, would require reconsideration of the size and shape of the Army overall and, in particular, the number of infantry battalions.

Turning now to the Staffords, the regiment and its predecessors have a fine and distinguished history, most recently in the Gulf but also in both world wars and in the Peninsular and Crimean wars. It is right and proper to pay credit to so many achievements over so long a period. I share the sadness of all those who regret that this and other famous regiments should now have to merge or be disbanded.

Of course, the decision to amalgamate the Staffords and the Cheshires was not welcomed by many of those associated with either regiment. I think it would be fair to say that every regiment would rather remain unchanged, but change to the decisions we have made can be done only at the expense of another regiment. A similar degree of pain and disappointment has been felt by all those affected by the changes, although I realise that this is no compensation for those concerned.

Mr. Budgen: Is it not the case that before the Secretary of State's announcement it was generally thought that the Royal Welch Fusiliers would be amalgamated, that there was some surprise when that regiment was left unamalgamated, and that plainly a political decision was taken to amalgamate the Staffords and the Cheshires? Will my right hon. Friend, who is the political head, please tell us what the political considerations were?

Mr. Hamilton: I am not prepared to comment on the process of the decision-making.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Why not?

Mr. Hamilton: I am about to reply. If my hon. Friend will be kind, I will make my point without him shouting at me. Military considerations were taken into account and recommendations were made to the Army Board, of which other Ministers and I are members. Those military considerations were accepted by the Army Board as a whole.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: I am also aware of a great deal of parliamentary and public interest in support of the Staffords. It is heartening to know that the regiment is held in such high public esteem.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No. I have a lot to say and I cannot give way.

Many of those seeking to challenge the decisions taken about individual regiments have quoted various criteria in support of their views. Past and present manning patterns, previous amalgamations—my hon. Friend made the point that the Staffords were the result of such an exercise in 1959—future demographic changes and the need to retain appropriate regional representations are all cases in point. But I must repeat that those criteria were fully taken into account when addressing the future of individual regiments. Taking any of those factors in isolation is misleading, and it was the Army Board's task to weigh those factors, along with all other relevant issues, in coming to its decision.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hamilton: I am not giving way. Containing, as it does, the senior serving members of the Army, the board was uniquely placed to weigh all the issues involved.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: This is an Adjournment debate and I have a very short time to answer it.

The board was also uniquely placed to devise a solution which was in the best interests of the Army as a whole. If we were to go into detail on what points were considered when it came to the different amalgamations that were put forward, that would not satisfy anybody who was unhappy about a certain regiment being amalgamated with another. It would merely give people a reason to question the assumptions, and the whole process would go on and on. If my hon. Friends and hon. Members think that it is good for the Army to reopen the whole issue, and to have the whole thing thrown back into the melting pot, they are totally and utterly wrong. The best thing we can do is to accept the decisions that have been made, unpalatable to some as they may be.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme) *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: I am not giving way. I wish that hon. Members would not try to invervene. I am not going to give way because I have a lot to say.

If hon. Members feel that it is for the benefit of the Army to reopen all these questions, they are wrong. Supporters of the Staffords and other infantry regiments facing changes have expressed concern about current overstretch and the possibility of its continuing—the hon. Member for Walsall, South made that point—or even worsening, following the restructuring. Regrettably, many inaccurate figures have been quoted by those who seek a reprieve. It may assist the House if I set out again the facts which underlie the Government's effort to eliminate overstretch as part of our commitment to a better future Army.

Regular infantry commitments in Germany will be reduced by a total of 10 battalions: three from Berlin and seven from British Army of the Rhine. The diminished land threat and increased warning time will allow five regular battalions previously committed to military home defence to be replaced by the Territorial Army, and withdrawal from Hong Kong will, by 1997, release a further four battalions. Thus by 1997, infantry battalion commitments will be reduced by 19. By contrast, the number of regular battalions will reduce by only 17, thereby leaving us with two additional battalions which will be made available to the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps.

The future Army will therefore be well placed to meet expected NATO readiness and availability requirements for the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps, while at the same time being able to meet existing emergency tour plot obligations with much improved tour intervals. Longer warning times in Europe have given us greater flexibility over how we meet our emergency tour plot commitments and it will be possible for units based in Germany to play a greater role in those deployments than

[Mr. Hamilton]

has been possible up to now. We plan also to make more frequent use of the Royal Marines and other arms in the emergency tour plot. Overall, we are well placed to ensure that the preferred 24 month tour plot—which is not always achieved now—will be achieved in the future.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend explain what connection this matter has with the decision that was taken last July to amalgamate the Cheshires with the Staffords? What is the relevance of what my right hon. Friend is saying? We understand the basic arguments in relation to "Options for Change", but fail to understand the relevance of the arguments that my right hon. Friend the Minister is now advancing to the decision taken last July.

Mr. Hamilton: One of the arguments being proposed is that, in practice, we shall not have enough infantry battalions to do the jobs that we are being asked to do.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: There will not be enough.

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend clearly has not listened to what I have been saying.

Mr. Winterton: I do not believe it.

Mr. Hamilton: If he does not believe it, that is a different matter. It is up to him to decide whether he believes me or not. There will be two more infantry battalions to meet our commitments due to the reorganisation. That is important when addressing the overall issue made by the hon. Member for Walsall, South who believes that the reductions in number in the Army are too great and mean that we will be unable to meet our commitments. That is not the case.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hamilton: No, I shall not give way because I have much more to say.

To the hon. Member for Walsall, South I say that, if there is a long-term change in our commitments and we become involved in long-lasting commitments that tie up additional infantry battalions, we shall have to reconsider the changes that we have made. However, we are happy that we have the battalions to carry out our present commitments. Therefore, we have had to take hard and difficult decisions on cap badge regiments. I agree that some people will always be unhappy. It is not only the Staffords and Cheshires who are concerned; there is anxiety in Scotland.

I was amazed at the intervention of the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Steven) who complained about the amalgamations in Scotland, when the Liberals call for a 50 per cent. cut in defence spending by the end of the century. It is difficult to see how that policy could be achieved without amalgamating even more regiments in Scotland.

I cannot stress enough that eliminating overstretch was a primary concern during the decision-making process. The difficulties that the infantry are experiencing are largely a result of undermanning and the reality is that the existing 55 infantry battalions are effectively reduced in manpower terms to the equivalent of only 51. That has meant that units have suffered increased turbulence and some battalions have had to undertake emergency tours at intervals significantly below the 24-month period that it has been long-standing Army policy to achieve.

Following amalgamation with the Cheshires, the new regiment should be able to achieve full strength, thus eliminating the cause of overstretch——

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: They are over-recruited now.

Mr. Hamilton: They are not over-recruited now. The Staffords are not over-recruited, but under-recruited now.

Mr. Winterton: They are.

Mr. Hamilton: They are not. This is an absurd conversation. I am telling my hon. Friend that the Staffords are under-recruited.

It is neither efficient nor effective to have units continually under strength. They struggle to meet their commitments, and, when deployed for an emergency tour, have to borrow men from other units to make up a full deployment, thus exacerbating overstretch in other battalions.

The number of battalions in the future Army is designed to ensure that that kind of overstretch will not normally occur, especially at a time when demography is having an adverse effect on recruitment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford raised also the criticisms that have been made of a lack of consultation before the decisions were announced. It was recognised from the outset that it would not be possible to consult about every conceivable option during the initial consultation phase. Consultation was therefore designed primarily to allow regiments to put forward their own ideas on amalgamations and to state their general positions.

I assure the House that the Staffords' wish to avoid amalgamation was fully taken into account, but the same wish was expressed by many other regiments, and I regret that it was not possible to satisfy them all. The ultimate decision in favour of a merger with the Cheshire Regiment was made in full knowledge of the objections that might be raised by the regiment and its supporters.

My colleagues and I have been pressed on numerous occasions to embark on detailed explanations of judgments as they affect individual regiments, including how and why they were made. The Army Board concluded that to do that would inevitably be divisive, painful for the units concerned, and altogether unproductive. For those tempted to believe that view was imposed by Ministers, I may point out that it is the view of senior Army officers on the board, with whom Ministers agree.

The question of suitable regional representation was also raised on a number of occasions, and was an important consideration during the board's discussions. The significance of local affiliations and the "family" feeling of infantry regiments is in no way underestimated. It is part of what makes the regimental system the success that it is.

The new regiment will continue to recruit from areas covered by its predecessors, and will seek to maintain and build on existing local links. Those two factors will help to ensure that the county continues to be represented in future, and will mean that those living in the area will have no difficulty identifying with their local regiment.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at fourteen minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Central America

1. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring of the ceasefire in El Salvador and the Central American peace process is being undertaken by him.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): Our embassies in all the countries of Central America keep a close watch on developments throughout the region, especially the progress of the peace process. Through the United Nations we support the work of the United Nations observer mission in El Salvador which has the task of monitoring all the elements of the recent peace agreement there, including the ceasefire.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister join me in welcoming the ceasefire which is under way in El Salvador and the prospects that it brings for a long-lasting peace? Does he recognise that the underlying social problems within the region—in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador as well as Nicaragua—are the basis of many of its problems? Will he ensure that the vast amount of aid which has been sent into the region for military purposes will in future be for peaceful purposes so that the region's social injustices are dealt with as rapidly as possible?

Mr. Garel-Jones: Certainly, I very much welcome what the hon. Gentleman said. Indeed, the Prime Minister sent a message of congratulation to President Christiani when the peace agreement was reached. Through the United Nations and the European Economic Community we shall certainly be doing all that we can to encourage the social reforms—for example, the reform of land ownership—to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We very much hope that such reforms will underpin the peace process.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does not President Christiani of El Salvador deserve widespread support, bearing in mind the fact that he was elected by the people of that country and that he has to cope with the violence of unruly military officers and also the murderous activities of the Farabundi Marti Front for the Liberation of the Nation? May I welcome the action of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in giving the president his direct support.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes. The Government have supported the process throughout. My hon. Friend may be aware that the prosecution of a number of military officers involved in the assassination of Jesuit priests was assisted by a team sent from Scotland Yard. That was much appreciated by the El Salvadorean Government and helped to bring the perpetrators of that murder to justice.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that for once—perhaps surprisingly—the House is united in welcoming the agreement and in congratulating all those involved, including the FMFLN for their part in the peace process? We are also interested in what the priorities are now for demilitarisation and reconstruction, and I ask the Minister specifically to approach our American colleagues to ask them to convert the substantial military aid that has until now been given to El Salvador into civilian aid to help with that reconstruction. Also, will the United Kingdom take the lead in ensuring that the next elections are full pluralist, democratic elections in which all elements of El Salvador society can participate fully and freely?

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes. I welcome what the hon. Gentleman says. As he will be aware, in June the United States Government had a sum of, I think, $21 million which had been earmarked for military aid set aside for the very purposes that the hon. Gentleman suggests. I understand that a further sum is now to be transferred from military aid to the promotion of the work that he suggests. I expect Britain and the European Economic Community to be standing ready to support the elections and the democratic process in El Salvador.

India

2. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with India.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): Our relations with India are now excellent. During my recent visit I had discussions with the President, the Prime Minister, and five other senior Cabinet Ministers. The atmosphere throughout was friendly and purposeful. Among other matters we discussed Kashmir and human rights.

We shall continue to support the Indian Government's courageous economic reform programme both bilaterally and at the IMF. The Indian Government have said that they appreciate our continued close co-operation in the fight against terrorism. We hope to complete work soon on an extradition treaty and an agreement on the confiscation of the assets of terrorists and drug traffickers.

Mr. Watts: I welcome my right hon. Friend's encouraging report of his visit to India. He will be well aware of the grave concerns of many of my constituents about reports of infringements of human rights in Kashmir and the Punjab. Will he tell the House a little more about what representations he made to the Government of India on those important matters?

Mr. Hurd: I underlined, as we have done before, our deep concern about abuses of human rights by Indian security forces in Punjab and Kashmir. It is fair to say that the greatest violators of human rights across the world are terrorists, but I stressed the fact that it was important for the Government of India to be more open in dealing with the accusations. I suggested that they might allow Amnesty International to play a bigger part in investigating those accusations. At the same time, I welcomed the Indian Government's decision to hold elections in the Punjab, and I hope that all parties there will feel able to take part.

Mr. Vaz: I welcome the Foreign Secretary's visit to India, but will the right hon. Gentleman reflect on the speech that he made in Luton at the end of last year? He unwisely criticised the Governments of both India and Pakistan in most undiplomatic terms. Does not the right hon. Gentleman accept that Kashmir is an issue primarily to be decided between those two Governments? Does not he feel that unwise comments such as those that he made do not help an already difficult situation?

Mr. Hurd: I did not find that any of the people to whom I talked in Delhi, either formally or informally, took that view. Our relationship with India, especially with the present Government of India, is such that we can talk about what is on our minds, and on the minds of many of our constituents, without causing offence. I shall not repeat what I said to the Government of India, but it is perfectly fair to say that it was well taken. At the same time, it is fair to point out to the Government of Pakistan, as we do, that is is not right or sensible for violence to be encouraged across frontiers.

Sir John Wheeler: Will my right hon. Friend continue to build on the excellent relationship between the Government of the United Kingdom and that of India, especially on the question of the vale of Kashmir? Will he urge on the Government of India the importance of allowing independent observers and visitors into that region, and of taking up Pakistan's offer that independent observers should be stationed along the line of control, to deal with the movement of people and the problem of terrorism, as well as the human rights issue?

Mr. Hurd: It is important, as I have said, that all practicable steps be taken to prevent violence from being encouraged across the frontier. I agree with my hon. Friend's first point. I made a point of saying to the Indian Ministers whom I met that, just as they had announced elections in the Punjab, so it would be excellent if they could start a political process in Kashmir so that there would be people representing the Kashmiris with whom the Government could talk.

Mr. Kaufman: In recent months I have had the opportunity to go to Kashmir by arrangement with both the Pakistani Government and the Indian Government, and I have seen the profound suffering among Kashmiris of both religions—Hindu and Muslim. Having seen the devastation in that beautiful valley that has resulted from the conflict, and having seen the impact of terrorism, which I deplore both there and here, may I say to the Secretary of State that while, of course, the matter must first be decided between India and Pakistan, no settlement can be acceptable that is not acceptable to the people of Kashmir, both Muslim and Hindu?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman and I approach the problem from somewhat different angles, but I do not disagree with his conclusion. He is right that any settlement must be based not just on discussions between India and Pakistan, as provided for in the Simla agreement, but on the political process in Kashmir.

Mr. Stanbrook: Did my right hon. Friend say that there might be a new treaty of extradition with India? If so, would that not be a retrograde step, considering that, at present, all extradition arrangements within the Commonwealth are governed by reciprocal legislation?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that it would be a retrograde step. The matter has been under negotiation, off and on, for several years now, as I remember from my time at the Home Office. Such a treaty would help reassure the Government of India that, within what is possible under the laws of the United Kingdom, we are anxious to co-operate with them in dealing with terrorism.

Commonwealth of Independent States

5. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to the Commonwealth of Independent States.

7. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on his recent visit to Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.

12. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States during his recent visit on United Kingdom relations with the members of the CIS.

Mr. Hurd: I visited Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Russia from 16 to 18 January. I held useful talks with the three Presidents Nazarbaev, Kravchuk and Yeltsin as well as with Ministers of their Governments. In each country my talks centred on the serious economic situation and military issues including proliferation. I also had a good talk on international topics with Mr. Kozyrev, the Russian Foreign Minister.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I welcome the reports that I have read in the newspapers of the latest version of the guns-for-butter strategy, whereby the republics give us their old guns or nuclear weapons in exchange for our Common Market surpluses. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House, however, that, before large amounts of financial aid are made available, he will make it clear to the Russian people and Government that it is not Governments but people who create wealth? For that reason, the Russians will need to have a community in which there is private property, freedom from regulation and low taxation, with the opportunity for people to accumulate wealth and invest it. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Government make that clear to the Russian people before advancing large sums?

Mr. Hurd: I think that President Yeltsin is already making that clear. These are lessons that the Russian people are learning fast and hard; it is not at all easy for them. We believe that the macro-economic major help to which my hon. Friend refers should come through the International Monetary Fund and should be the result of a reform process with which the IMF is associated. That is why we are pressing so hard for Russia, Ukraine and other republics to be admitted to the IMF as soon as possible.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the immediate and generous sending of food aid, particularly to Moscow and St. Petersburg, is enormously welcome? Does he further agree, however, that there are many cities, towns and villages in the former Soviet Union with less famous names which also need urgent food aid? Will my right hon. Friend do what he can to ensure that they receive that food aid from the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hurd: Yes. It was a point that President Yeltsin made strongly to us. In parallel with the American emergency air lift recently announced, we are offering a supply of badly needed aid to Ekaterinburg, formerly Sverdlovsk—the kind of city of which my hon. Friend is thinking—and details of that British aid are now being worked out.

Mr. Macdonald: Will the Government reciprocate President Yeltsin's announcement last week and declare that British nuclear missiles will no longer be targeted on Russian cities or any cities in the former Soviet republics, including Moscow? That may be only a symbol, but it is an important one.

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed our nuclear deterrent with President Yeltsin in London on Thursday. The hon. Gentleman will have seen what President Yeltsin said as a result. I believe that he understands more clearly than before the minimum nature of our deterrent—and that we intend to keep it.

Mr. Kaufman: Regarding that point, when the right hon. Gentleman saw President Yeltsin did he explain to him why until very recently this Government have said that a minimum effective deterrent is 512 nuclear warheads and why they are now saying that an effective deterrent could be fewer than 192 nuclear warheads?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman is confused between boats and warheads. We have always said that four boats are the minimum. That is now the difference between us and the Labour party. The difference used to be much wider—before the right hon. Gentleman changed his tune. Formerly, he was in favour of the abolition of Trident, but he is now in favour of three boats. We believe that four boats are the minimum, but have always said that on those four boats the maximum would be 128 warheads per boat. That is what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said again yesterday.

Middle East

6. **Sir Dennis Walters:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards achieving a middle east peace settlement.

12. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the middle east talks.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The issues dividing Israel and the Arabs are complex and will inevitably take much time and effort to resolve. There has neverthelss been slow but steady progress towards a middle east peace settlement since the Madrid conference last October. I look forward to a further round of bilateral negotiations between Israel and her Arab neighbours soon. There is now a chance to secure a comprehensive settlement based on security for Israel, justice for the Palestinians and peace for all who live in the region. I urge both sides to seize it.

Sir Dennis Walters: After the early promise of Madrid, the peace talks have been disappointingly slow. To assist progress, will my hon. Friend and the EC consider telling Mr. Shamir that they will take economic action unless Israel stops its illegal settlement programme in the occupied territories and abides by the Geneva convention, which is being systematically broken?

Mr. Hogg: It was always inevitable that the talks would be slow. The issues involved are extraordinarily difficult and their resolution is complicated. I agree that the settlement policy that is being pursued by Israel is a serious obstacle to the conclusion of a peace settlement. I entirely agree that the Geneva convention—the fourth convention—applies to the occupied territories. We shall impress both those things on Mr. Shamir.

Sir David Steel: Is the Minister aware that I returned this morning from a short visit to four countries in the middle east? Does he accept that the recent Moscow round of talks has two universal consequences? The first is the conclusion that it does not do any good for any delegation to stay away from any part of the process and that all parties should hang in there and keep the discussions going with as much momentum as possible. Secondly, although it is understandable that the external leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organisation may be excluded at the moment, it is not understandable that the Palestinian leaders in Jerusalem should be excluded from the process.

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it is undesirable for any delegation to stay away. I very much regret that both the Syrians and the Lebanese stayed away from the multilaterals and that, although present, the Palestinians did not join in in a positive way. On the question of representation within the Palestinian delegation from the diaspora, which is the point that the right hon. Gentleman is addressing——

Sir David Steel: From Jerusalem.

Mr. Hogg: From east Jerusalem, so be it.

The agreement on Palestinian representation was put together carefully before the Madrid talks. I should be reluctant to see the balance changed because that may destabilise the talks. There is greater scope for a change in the context of the multilaterals than in the context of the bilaterals. Clearly, the views of Palestinians with east Jerusalem must be represented some way or another.

Mr. Adley: Following the question by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), is there not essentially a double standard when one delegation can bring whomsoever it likes to the talks, whether those people were born in the Soviet Union or the United States, and another delegation is told whom it can and whom it cannot bring? How does my hon. and learned Friend expect Palestinians to feel that they will get a fair crack of the whip while they are subjected to those double standards?

Mr. Hogg: I understand the thinking behind my hon. Friend's point. In the abstract it has a great deal of force. That said, it is most important to get the parties to start the process of negotiation. For that purpose one must sometimes accept a composition of a team or delegation that in abstract terms is different from that which one would wish. The real objective is to get the talks started.

Mr. Ernie Ross: As part of the Minister's continued opposition to settlements, can he say how the British Government, as a member of the troika, will discharge their responsibilities under the recent protocol signed with Israel and the European Economic Community to ensure that none of the money will go to any Israeli projects with any connection with settlements on the west bank or Gaza?

Mr. Hogg: We shall have to consider the modalities when the time arises. I re-emphasise that the policy of settlements in the occupied territories is a serious obstacle to a peace settlement. I hope that the Israelis will desist. Indeed, if they were to announce their decision to desist, it would be an important confidence-building measure that could lead to others—for example, the suspension of the Arab boycott.

Sir Robert Rhodes James: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware of the strong opinion of all parties within Israel that the peace process is irreversible, that there is a desire to compromise and that certain comments from certain Members of this House are not helpful?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend brings a great deal of expertise to bear on this issue. I know that he paid a useful and constructive visit recently. I agree with him about the irreversibility of the peace process. That is correct.

Mr. Anderson: The Minister has said that the settlements policy pursued by the Israeli Government is a major obstacle to progress in the peace talks. Will he therefore take this opportunity of welcoming the positive statement recently made by Mr. Shimon Peres, the leader of the Israeli Labour party, that if elected in June he would put a freeze on the settlements in the occupied territories.

Mr. Hogg: I certainly welcome any statement made by any Israeli politician to the effect that if in government he would put a freeze on the settlement policy. I would hope that that would be the policy of Mr. Shamir's Government should they be re-elected in June.

EC Membership

8. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what definition of the geographical extent of Europe will be used when considering the applications of other countries to join the Community.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The treaty of Rome provides under article 237 that "any European state" may apply to become a member of the Community. The treaty does not define how this is to be interpreted geographically.

Mr. Gill: In thanking my right hon. Friend for that answer, may I ask him to have regard to the stresses and strains that already exist in a predominantly Christian European Community and to consider whether they would be increased if we admitted to the Community nations with a predominantly Islamic culture?

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend will no doubt be aware that a Turkish application to join the Community has been received. Indeed, the Commission has given its opinion. In so far as geographical definitions can be made, we have defined Turkey as a country which could be a member of the Community and for our purposes Turkey is regarded as a European country.

Mr. William Ross: At one time people used to talk about Europe ending at the Urals, but, given the extent of the former USSR, that is no longer a reasonable definition. Given the tremendous wealth in the far eastern regions of the former USSR, should we not consider them part of Europe if we are to try to expand the European Community for the benefit of all mankind?

Mr. Garel-Jones: I think that most hon. Members would agree that probably it is difficult to determine a strict geographic definition of Europe. The Community already has a substantial agenda for enlargement before it—an agenda in which Britain has been in the lead. Under that agenda we already have five applications on the table—two from EFTA countries and three from southern Mediterranean countries. We also have association agreements with three eastern European countries—Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. That will give us plenty to work on in the next decade, and that is probably as far as we should look for the time being.

Mr. Knapman: If we are to make further progress with our EC neighbours, surely we need to build on sure foundations. Such foundations would be laid by further progress towards a non-protectionist free market. Has my right hon. Friend made any progress in that direction?

Mr. Garel-Jones: My hon. Friend will be aware that the single market was an initiative originally pushed by the United Kingdom Government. It is due to reach its completion during our presidency in the latter part of this year. Its completion will be one of the leading priorities of the British presidency next year.

Mr. Robertson: The Government talk about the enlargement of the Community and apparently have included it as one of their objectives for the British presidency next year. How does that sit with the fact that the Austrian application lay on the table for two years before the British Government said a word of welcome to that country? When will the Government realise that enlargement will not be acceptable just as a slogan for the Tory re-election campaign, but that it means saying now, and clearly, that the EFTA countries are needed in the Community and that early membership for central and eastern European countries, according to realisable targets, should be a priority to which we are committed?

Mr. Garel-Jones: The House, the country and the rest of Europe are well aware that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) led the charge on enlargement and that that particular banner has been taken up with enthusiasm by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. It is well known in the EFTA countries and in those of central Europe that Britain has been perhaps the strongest advocate of enlargement. We will continue to be so.

President Yeltsin

9. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his last meeting with President Yeltsin of Russia on matters relating to United Kingdom relations with the former Soviet republics.

Mr. Hurd: In a long meeting with President Yeltsin in Moscow on 20 January I discussed economic reform, security questions including non-proliferation, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and relations between Britain and Russia. On 30 January I took part in the Prime Minister's discussions with President Yeltsin, following which the British-Russian joint declaration and an agreement on consular posts were signed. In the words of the joint declaration, the two countries have opened a new page in their relations.

Mr. King: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, had this country adopted the supine, innocents-abroad foreign and defence policies of the Opposition parties, the reforms and changes that have taken place in the Soviet Union would not have resulted in President Boris Yeltsin being the president of Russia? Does he also agree that only by standing shoulder to shoulder with our American and NATO allies have we been able to win the war against communism in the Soviet bloc? Does he agree that we must now win the war of economic survival by those countries and that this country is well placed to meet that objective?

Mr. Hurd: There are kind and unkind ways of making that point. The kindest way is to say that, had we followed the advice so loudly and frequently given by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and his colleagues seven or eight years ago, it is highly probable that the hammer and sickle would still be flying over the Kremlin and, more importantly, that the Soviet armies would be massed in Europe. I agree with my hon. Friend that perhaps a moral can be drawn from that.

Mr. Tony Banks: Does the Secretary of State share many people's concern about the fate of some 100,000 Soviet or ex-Soviet nuclear scientists who seem to be voting with their feet, particularly those who appear to have the skills to dismantle the 27,000 or so warheads, and the possibility that those skills may be lost? What discussions has he had with Mr. Yeltsin about that serious matter, and what steps will Europe and the United States take to try to secure the services of those nuclear scientists in the Soviet Union?

Mr. Hurd: We discussed that point with President Yeltsin and it is very much on his mind. He takes the understandable view that it is for him to take the first steps in Russia, which he is doing to keep the scientists in Russia. The same is true of the other republics. However, he knows that several countries, including Britain, are willing to help in that process.

Mr. Temple-Morris: During my right hon. Friend's discussions, did he have a chance to discuss the appalling slaughter that is going on between Armenians and Azeris, not least over the Armenian conclave of Nagorny-Karabakh? What can the United Kingdom do to help, and in what context does President Yeltsin's pronouncement about some form of United Nations' supervision offer good news for the future?

Mr. Hurd: The Russians are certainly trying to bring the two sides together for talks and end the fighting, but, so far, they are finding it a hard row. My hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State who went to the conference on security and co-operation in Europe meeting in Prague last week was able to take an initiative and arrange for the CSCE to send a human rights team to the two republics to see whether it can help matters. The fighting is extremely worrying, and anyone who has listened to the comments of my noble Friend Lady Cox on the subject must be deeply worried by it.

Mr. Cryer: What is the Secretary of State doing about nuclear non-proliferation? Instead of indulging in childish comments about the number of nuclear weapons, what does he say to the 140 non-nuclear nations who signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty? Does not he have some regard for them? Why does not he tell Russia and the other former Soviet Union countries that we want them to get rid of nuclear weapons? Would not it be a good idea if the United Kingdom, instead of embarking on the Trident programme, abandoned it and withdrew Polaris to demonstrate our solidarity and support for the vast majority of the world's nations which are signatories to the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty?

Mr. Hurd: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is so far behind the evolution of his party's policy. It is now in favour of three Tridents, but Opposition Members do not seem to have got that point yet. The hon. Gentleman draws attention to the non-proliferation treaty. The right answer is that all those who have signed the treaty should abide by it, the safeguards in the treaty applied to signatories such as Iraq should be strengthened, and countries that have not signed it should be encouraged to do so.

Baltic Republics

10. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he intends to develop relations with the Baltic republics.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We intend to develop relations actively. We are giving practical help in consolidating their independence, building up democratic systems of government and rebuilding their economies. The bulk of our assistance is being directed through the European Community technical and emergency assistance programmes. We have also committed over £900,000 to projects through the know-how fund. We sponsored their UN membership applications. We pressed in the European Community for early trade and co-operation agreements: these are now being negotiated. We are supporting early IMF membership. Finally, we are resolving the Baltic gold question, in a prompt and effective manner, which will give an important boost to the Baltic economies.

Mr. Cash: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware of the importance that the Baltic states attach to financial autonomy? Does he agree that one of the most useful ways in which we can give them know-how is to tell them how we managed, in the light of the Maastricht agreement, to reject the principle of monetary union? Is he giving them advice, along the lines that he described, to ensure that they manage to implement the sensible planning that comes from being able to run their own affairs, as they obviously wish to do?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the connection between the maintenance of a democratic system and a change in economic structures. That link must underpin that country's forward policy. But the most important action that it can take is to enter into a programme with the IMF as soon as possible, on the back of which it will gain access to many western funds.

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister extend the application of the know-how fund in the Baltic states to the environmental problems that they have inherited, in particular the devastation left by the oil shale industry in Estonia?

Mr. Hogg: As I made clear to the House when I answered the main question, the know-how fund has been heavily used in the Baltic republics, on which about £900,000 has been spent. I think that the sort of environmental problem to which the hon. Gentleman referred is so great that it is probably best dealt with by multilateral institutions.

Mr. William Powell: May I say how welcome is the strong support that Great Britain has given to the Baltic states? Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that in the Baltic states today the problems of lack of food and hunger are just as serious as, if not more serious than, those in the big cities of the former Soviet Union, but that they receive little attention? Will my hon. and learned Friend ensure that everything is done to enable food supplies to be extended to the Baltic states as well as to Russia?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend has made a sound point. He will know that £32 million of emergency food aid has been agreed through the EC mechanisms.

Mr. Trimble: The Minister will be aware of the substantial minorities in each of the Baltic states, some of which, prior to the recognition of their independence, were being used to impede that development. In respect of those minorities, has any suggestion been made to revise the frontiers of the Baltic states? Has it been thought necessary to make any special provision to protect the position of those minorities?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman makes an important and serious point. There are ethnic minorities in all the Baltic republics. An encouraging agreement has been made between the Lithuanian Government and Poland on the ethnic Poles in Lithuania, which we support. There is a greater problem in relation to Estonia and Latvia, where there are substantial numbers of ethnic Russians. In the capital, Riga, ethnic Russians are in the majority. There are no proposals to vary frontiers. As the hon. Gentleman will know, we believe that frontiers should not be changed, save with the wholehearted consent of all the relevant parties. The issue of ethnic and minority rights is probably best addressed through the mechanism of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe. All three states have acceded to the CSCE.

Iraq

13. **Sir George Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his latest information on Iraq's nuclear capability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The inspection reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency, circulated as United Nations Security Council documents, provide the most detailed information on Iraq's nuclear capability. Copies of the first eight IAEA inspection reports are available in the House of Commons Library. The IAEA has issued a press statement on the latest inspection, the ninth, a copy of which will also be placed in the Library.

Sir George Gardiner: In view of the assessment by a nuclear expert from the United Nations Commission that Iraq has the technology and the means to produce up to four nuclear weapons a year, is my hon. and learned Friend satisfied that the United Nations inspection procedures are adequate to prevent the manufacture of those weapons? Is he satisfied that an effective deterrent system is in place to prevent their deployment?

Mr. Hogg: There are perhaps two important questions wrapped up in my hon. Friend's remarks. I think that the intrusive system of inspection that we have introduced through recent Security Council resolutions is probably adequate, provided that it is vigorously enforced, to prevent the Iraqis from developing a weapon. One cannot be certain about that; one can only express an opinion as to the probability.

A different point—again a very important one—relates to the general powers of the IAEA and to its ability to monitor civil programmes to prevent covert programmes. There we are working hard to boost the inspection powers of the IAEA to try to address problems of the kind that were thrown up in Iraq.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister agree that Iraq remains, whether now or in the foreseeable future, a potent, potential peril not only to its neighbours but to world peace? Is not it a pity that when we had the chance we did not finish the job?

Mr. Hogg: I think that Saddam Hussein is much less potent than he was, but I accept that it is a brutal regime and that it poses a threat to world peace. The question whether we should have proceeded with the Gulf war is another issue, but I remind the House of the repeated statements by my right hon. Friend, President Bush and others as to the limited purpose of that operation. We were acting under the authority of the Security Council for the purpose authorised by the Security Council, and that did not extend to the invasion of Iraq otherwise than for the purpose of driving it out of Kuwait.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Will my hon. and learned Friend take the opportunity to pay tribute to the United Nations inspectors in Iraq who suffered harassment while carrying out a vital duty on behalf of us all? May I wish my hon. and learned Friend well in getting proper safeguards over the vexed problem of undisclosed sites?

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The House will know that 46 British inspectors have been involved in the process of inspection within Iraq. Certainly I pay tribute to them and to their colleagues from other countries.

On the second part of my hon. Friend's question, yes, it is important to enhance the verification and inspection powers of IAEA. I hope that we shall succeed in doing that, especially with regard to special inspections of previously undeclared sites.

Mr. Galloway: According to Mordechai Vanunu, who is serving 18 years in solitary confinement, Israel has more than 200 nuclear warheads capable of reaching even the Soviet Union. Why is Israel allowed to have nuclear weapons—the same abuse of international treaties—but Iraq is not?

Mr. Hogg: We are very anxious to promote a total dismantling of weapons of mass destruction in the middle east.

Nuclear Weapons

15. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on developments in reducing nuclear weapons in Europe since 1983.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Since 1983, as a result of both NATO's resilience and its willingness to respond rapidly to change, significant progress has been made in reducing nuclear weapons. The 1987 intermediate nuclear forces treaty eliminated all United States and Soviet ground-based intermediate range nuclear missiles. Last autumn President Bush and President Gorbachev announced the elimination of ground-based, short-range nuclear weapons, an undertaking which the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States has agreed to honour. The United Kingdom is also playing a full part by halving our sub-strategic stockpile. President Bush's recent initiative on strategic arms takes this a step further, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear last week that we welcome President Yeltsin's commitment to deep cuts in super-power arsenals.

Mr. Thompson: My hon. and learned Friend's reply is very welcome. Does he recall the debate that took place some years ago about the deployment of cruise missiles? Does he recall that resulting NATO policy has been successful? Does he also recall the attitude of some Opposition politicians and, indeed, many local councillors in Norwich who actively opposed NATO and its policies at that time? Does he share my hope that a lesson has been learnt from that?

Mr. Hogg: I rather doubt whether the lesson has been fully learnt by Opposition Members, but the reference to "some Opposition politicians" is too general; we ought to make it more particular. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was a strong opponent of the deployment of cruise missiles. Had that policy prevailed, I doubt whether we would have had even the INF treaty.

Mr. James Lamond: Does the Minister recall the remark made by President Yeltsin the other day which so delighted the Prime Minister—that Britain's nuclear weapons were irrelevant and of no consequence in the discussions about nuclear disarmament? Does not that remark demonstrate that we never had an independent nuclear deterrent, as neither President Yeltsin nor anyone else in the Soviet Union accepted it as a deterrent; and that we have poured tens of billions of pounds down the drain trying to maintain that mystique?

Mr. Hogg: That question merely illustrates the fact that the Labour party is historically a party of unilateral disarmament and that, by prejudice and policy, it is to a considerable degree still a party of unilateral disarmament.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the out-of-date nuclear systems that we are withdrawing from Europe have ensured that Europe is a very much safer place, and that the minimum deterrence that we are planning with Trident should be supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House, in practice as well as in theory?

Mr. Hogg: I certainly agree. That is why I deplore the various policy statements made by the right hon. Member for Gorton in the past opposing the deployment of Trident. That was an entirely wrong policy, and I think it time that he apologised to the House for having espoused it.

Hong Kong

16. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the number of seats that will be directly elected to the Legislative Council of Hong Kong in 1995.

Mr. Hurd: Before I answer the question, Mr. Speaker, perhaps you will allow me to record the shock with which the Government and, I imagine, the whole House heard of the tragedy of the deaths of 21 Vietnamese in the Shek Kong camp in Hong Kong on 3 and 4 February. Our sympathy goes to the bereaved and the injured.

As for the question on the Order Paper, we have two linked objectives. First, we want steady progress towards a greater degree of democracy in Hong Kong. Secondly, we want this progress to be sustained without interruption after the transfer of sovereignty in 1997. In order to achieve that, it is obviously necessary to discuss arrangements for the next elections—the 1995 elections—with the Chinese Government when the time is right.

Mr. Martin: Since Tiananmen square, the Hong Kong community has been very worried about the future. I hope that every step will be taken to negotiate the best possible deal for a democratic future for Hong Kong. Will the Minister make sure that such assurances are given to the hard-working community in Hong Kong?

Mr. Hurd: Most people in Hong Kong have two ambitions, which are not always easy to reconcile. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the first; in my original answer, I showed how we intend to work towards it. The second is the desire that the transition between now and 1997 and thereafter should be smooth and that the principle of two systems in one country should be honoured. We repeatedly emphasise that point to the Chinese Government, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did to Mr. Li Peng in New York last week.

Sir Peter Blaker: Will my right hon. Friend convey to the Governor of Hong Kong my congratulations and those of the House on the skilful and successful way in which he has conducted the affairs of Hong Kong in difficult circumstances for the past five years? Will he confirm that contrary to some suspicions expressed in various parts of the media and by some politicians, the major factor in the mind of Her Majesty's Government when forming their policy towards Hong Kong is protecting the interests of Hong Kong and its people?

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend is quite right in what he says about Sir David Wilson and also about his second point. We try to make it clear to people in Hong Kong and to the Government of China that the main component in our relationship with the People's Republic of China must be Hong Kong and carrying the 1984 agreement to success.

Mr. Loyden: What are the impediments to the universal franchise for Hong Kong?

Mr. Hurd: That it would come to an abrupt end in 1997.

Commonwealth of Independent States

19. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent international initiatives have been sponsored by the United Kingdom concerning the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom is supporting the applications of states from the Commonwealth of Independent States to join the United Nations and the IMF. We are consulting closely our western partners and allies to ensure that the many economic and security questions arising from the dissolution of the former Soviet Union are tackled in an orderly fashion. We have invited all the members of the CIS to open full diplomatic relations. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has launched a new scheme to bring to Britain for work experience 1,000 secondees from the CIS. We supported the accession of the CIS states to the conference on security and co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. and learned Friend has listed a series of initiatives taken by the Government in relation to the member states of the CIS. Is not it important, especially in the economic negotiations, that the leading role of the International Monetary Fund is stressed, but that we should be cautious about the way in which the IMF responds to the various questions raised by members of the CIS? The sums involved are potentially huge, and we are anxious that they are properly spent and that the reform programmes are in place.

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's emphasis on the involvement of the IMF in the economic reconstruction of Russia and the other republics of the CIS. On the back of such IMF programmes, it will be possible to give yet further assistance to the republics of the CIS.

Mr. Dalyell: On security, is not the most urgent initiative to try to help the republics with the leaking trigger mechanisms of many of the nuclear devices on their territory? Should not we as a practical matter offer them the facilities of Burghfield and Dounreay to do something about the beryllium and other toxic compounds which are doubtless leaking from ill-maintained equipment? Even the manuals have been taken away by those who have found jobs in Iran and elsewhere.

Mr. Hogg: There are at least two priorities that we need to address. First, there is the question of making safe the many missiles and warheads that were spread throughout the CIS. Secondly, there is the question of scientists with particular knowledge. On the latter point, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it plain in his statement that we shall explore further with Russia and the other republics how best we can assist in the provision of employment for the scientists within the CIS to prevent them from going abroad.

There are also important questions about the handling, safeguarding and transport of missile systems. A team will go out to Russia from this country during the week beginning 10 February to see what part we can play in that process.

20. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the recent Washington conference on aid for the republics of the former Soviet Union.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the conference and co-chaired the working group on food. The conference was a success and will help the west to translate its assistance into effective action on the ground. Active follow-up with the former Soviet republics is now well in hand.

Mr. Couchman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Did the subject of the know-how fund and the question whether there might be Russian secondees to British financial, legal and insurance firms as part of the effort arise?

Mrs. Chalker: Neither the know-how fund nor the announcement of the places for 1,000 secondees was part of the Washington conference. However, the know-how fund is doing extremely good work throughout the former Soviet republics, where we have been asked for that help, as it is in the rest of central and eastern Europe. The 1,000 places which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the week before last are already being found and offered by British industry and British institutions. We shall forward the work for the 1,000 secondees to come to this country as speedily as we can.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does the Minister agree that one of the most positive actions that the Government could take would be to encourage the republics of the former Soviet Union to cut arms expenditure? Does she agree that we should build on the remarkable achievement of the Kazakhstani people who, before the break-up of the Soviet Union, succeeded in closing the main nuclear test site in Kazakhstan? Would not an extension and strengthening of the nuclear test ban treaty be a means of helping the Soviet people?

Mrs. Chalker: The most important thing that Kazakhstan could do would be to sign the non-proliferation treaty. Of course, all the republics of the former Soviet Union would do well to turn their energies to creating growth in their economies. We shall do our best to help them, but the west cannot solve the problems of the CIS for it. We are involved in an exercise of partnership through sharing know-how with those republics in a wide variety of different areas, but any changes must necessarily be made by the republics themselves.

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

21. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the Government's objectives for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): The Government's objectives for UNCED are the signature of global conventions on climate change and biodiversity; a statement of principles on forests; a comprehensive plan for the 21st century; a short earth charter of environmental principles; and reinforcement of existing international environmental institutions.

Mr. Paice: I am sure that the House very much hopes that the Government's objectives are achieved because they will be a major step towards solving the issues of the international environment. Does my hon. Friend agree that that approach contrasts greatly with the latest approach from Brussels, which is that international bodies should be involved in deciding even where we erect a front porch?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is clear that progress at UNCED will be made by all the participants that attend. It will be a matter for each national Government to play their part in trying to bring about those objectives.

Personal Statement

3.32 pm

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a personal statement. On Friday last, I spoke in the debate on Second Reading of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I was called at 2.16 pm, and from the outset I did not expect to be able to complete my speech by 2.30 pm. On being asked by the hon. Members for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) and for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) whether I was talking out the Bill, I replied:

> "I am not going to talk it out; I am going to make my views known."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1258.]

I now recognise that the effect of my words was to mislead hon. Members and that Members were entitled to assume that I intended to resume my seat before 2.30 pm. I deeply regret having misled hon. Members in that way. I offer my unreserved apologies to you, Mr. Speaker, and to fellow hon. Members.

Points of Order

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had a request today for a statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland? As you know, the citizens charter is the jewel in the crown of the Prime Minister's Administration. Seven months after the event, apparently a citizens charter for Northern Ireland—the first one—is about to be launched in Belfast. By launching it in such a hole-in-the-corner way, the Secretary of State is avoiding questions in this House and is putting at a serious disadvantage those Ulster Members of Parliament who are attending to the business of the House. They are being kept in ignorance of the citizens charter, cannot comment on it and do not know what is contained in it.

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for any statement outside this House. However, I am sure that what the hon. Gentleman said will have been heard by those on the Government Front Bench who are responsible.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I request a statement from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland both about yesterday's incident in Northern Ireland and about the most recent incident today, in which, I believe, another six people were killed in one multiple murder attack? It is essential that a Minister makes a statement as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker: Again, I am sure that the whole House has deep sympathy with those affected by the events in Ulster at the moment, and what the hon. Gentleman said will have been noted.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During yesterday's Prime Minister's questions, all hon. Members will have distinctly heard the Prime Minister ask, whether inadvertently or not, the rhetorical question, "Did we cause the recession?" The Prime Minister's question was recorded on television and radio, yet it does not appear in the *Official Report*. Can you, Mr. Speaker, give me any guidance on how the Prime Minister's question came to be removed from the *Official Report*?

Mr. Speaker: I should need notice of that question to look into it——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Another Government cut!

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not for me to read his mind, but it occurred to me that the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) might have been referring to the fact that Opposition Members were saying, "Answer, answer." That kind of rhetorical question would not appear in *Hansard*, because if such comments did, there would not be room for much else. If the Prime Minister's whole answer has disappeared, however, that is a very serious matter, and I shall look into it.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not expect you to answer my question immediately, but I think that it is a serious point.

Hansard is the official report of the proceedings of the House, and takes precedence over any other record of our proceedings; yet, simply by watching the videotape—as hon. Members know, we now have a video record of everything that occurs in the House—we can see that we are now in a totally ludicrous situation. We can read the words in *Hansard*, and then, by observing what has happened on the videotape, see clearly that what actually happened is not what is recorded in *Hansard*.

According to the procedures of the House, the records in *Hansard* are deemed to be the official report of the House. Surely common sense shouts at us that, in future, the proper, official record of the House must be that which is preserved on videotape, so that we can all see and hear it. I ask you to look into the matter, Mr. Speaker. We shall make ourselves look very silly unless we resolve it quickly. Yesterday's record will clearly show——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I believe that the hon. Gentleman has made that point before.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it further to this point?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The reason why the whole of the Prime Minister's answer could not be heard was the barracking of Opposition Members when the Prime Minister had uttered only a few words. We were able to hear what he was saying, but Opposition Members deliberately blocked it out. I have the record here.

Mr. Speaker: That did not exactly follow the previous point of order, but I shall deal with both together.

First, let me say to the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) that yesterday's was a very noisy Prime Minister's Question Time: even I had difficulty in hearing what was said. Secondly, I say to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) that it has always been the rule in the House that *Hansard* is the official report. If the hon. Gentleman wants to change that, he must understand that it can be done only by direction of the House.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received a request from the Department of Health for a statement to be made by a Minister, following the occasion during this morning's sitting of European Standing Committee B, when the Committee voted against Government policy? May we have a statement from the Government to the effect that they will now back the European proposal to ban the advertising of tobacco throughout the Community?

Mr. Speaker: If that took place during a Standing Committee sitting, it is not a matter for me to deal with here.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I feel that we are approaching dangerous ground if we are to allow *Hansard* to report "noises off" during Prime Minister's Question Time. It was abundantly clear a week or so ago, when the Leader of the Opposition questioned the Prime Minister about something that he had read in a popular tabloid newspaper, that his claims were grotesquely wrong, and Conservative Members said as much at the time; but *Hansard* failed to report that. I would caution against allowing *Hansard* to report all the rubbish that comes from the Opposition Benches.

Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that there is no rubbish in this place, but let me put the matter into proper perspective. The whole House knows, I think, that *Hansard* is a report of what goes on in the Chamber. I have said before that, if it reported every hon. Member's words absolutely verbatim, speeches might not be wholly and always understood. Sometimes, therefore, some licence is taken in putting them into correct English, and I am sure that hon. Members always feel when they read *Hansard* how excellent their speeches are—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—probably as a result of that. Sedentary interruptions are not recorded, for reasons that I have already stated.

Criminal Instruction

3.39 pm

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to impose restrictions upon the publication of information which may facilitate or encourage the commission of certain offences; to make further provision about the sale of items which may assist the commission of certain offences; and for connected purposes.

The purpose of the Bill is threefold. It would impose restrictions upon the publication or broadcasting of material that provides clear and detailed information and instruction on how to commit criminal offences. It is designed to introduce restrictions on material that is published or broadcast that encourages the commission of criminal offences. Finally, it is designed to place restrictions upon the sale of items that are used solely or mainly to assist in carrying out criminal acts.

I believe that all hon. Members are greatly concerned —as, indeed, is the whole country—about the widespread increase in crime. Many of us, in all parts of the House, complain about it, but rarely are common-sense, practical proposals made to try to do something about it.

It is crazy that television programmes in particular can broadcast information that can be used directly by criminals, or potential criminals, to assist them in carrying out their dirty deeds. This affects all sorts of programmes. They can be entertainment programmes, the familiar detective serials, news programmes and, believe it or not, Mr. Speaker, even programmes whose express purpose is to do the opposite. I refer to programmes that are designed to detect and deter crime, such as "Crimewatch" and "Crimestoppers". Sadly, I have it on good authority that these programmes have become compulsive viewing for criminals. They often provide the most up-to-date techniques on how to carry out offences. I choose, as random examples, breaking into cars, overriding steering locks, crossing wires, breaking into premises, carrying out credit frauds, and so on.

We do not propose for one minute that programmes such as these should be banned. They do a good job. However, people should realise that information may be implanted that could be useful to criminals. If restrictions were imposed upon the publication of that information, no restriction would necessarily be placed on artistic freedom, the dramatic effect of programmes or their accuracy. We need these programmes; they should continue.

In addition, certain programmes appear to encourage people, especially young people, to commit criminal acts. A body of academic evidence is being developed, in particular the work of Professor Bandura, that suggests that children are influenced and impressed by programmes that glorify the criminal and make him out to be an attractive figure. Imitation of criminals is common among young people and may explain why the commission of serious crimes is rising so fast among them.

Last year, a number of my constituents, including concerned parents, and the police contacted me about the content of the well-known children's programme "Grange Hill". It was alleged that that programme showed youngsters breaking into cars and joyriding in them. They were presented almost as hero figures among their peers. One mum contacted me and said, "Mr. Smith, what on earth are you going to do? I am trying my best to guide my children and exercise parental responsibility, but when they turn on television at the peak viewing time for children, they see all that going on."

We should not have to legislate. Responsible programme makers and other people with responsibility for what is broadcast should provide their own code of practice and code of conduct. I stress that there is no evidence that what is being done is intentional, but it is damaging and the House has a duty to the country to try to prevent it.

Finally, it is worrying and disturbing that it is now possible—in fact, it is a widespread practice—to purchase items which are widely advertised in the papers and whose sole or main purpose is to commit a criminal act. One can buy a car lock gun, which is widely advertised and which crooks use to break into cars. I would not mind betting that many hon. Members have had their cars broken into a number of times in the past year or so. We are assisting criminals to do so. It is ludicrous that one can buy such a thing.

One can also buy specialist radio equipment which scans the short waves to pick up police communications, and evidence suggests that it is a common practice among criminals to divert the police on duty. The criminals listen to the radio and commit a criminal act elsewhere, untouched and undetected. The House cannot accept such a situation.

Another ludicrous example is that one can easily buy a gadget to fit on a car which will pick up a radar speed check in advance of the car arriving at that check. There is only one purpose for that, which is to break the law. It is wrong that people should be allowed to buy such items, which are generally available, in order to break the law.

Those are three practical proposals. They are backed by a body of empirical evidence now being produced but, far more importantly, ordinary common sense tells us that the honest, decent, law-abiding citizens who are, sadly, the victims of crime which is undermining the quality of our lives know that it is happening. They think it is ridiculous and that something should be done.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John P. Smith, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. David Clelland, Mr. Chris Butler, Mr. Alun Michael, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones and Mr. Ray Powell.

CRIMINAL INSTRUCTION

Mr. John P. Smith accordingly presented a Bill to impose restrictions upon the publication of information which may facilitate or encourage the commission of certain offences; to make further provision about the sale of items which may assist the commission of certain offences; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 February and to be printed. [Bill 67.]

Orders of the Day

Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 6

SCOTTISH FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may by order establish a body corporate to be known as 'the Scottish Further Education Funding Council' (referred to in this Part of this Act as the 'Funding Council').

(2) An order establishing the Funding Council shall prescribe such of the functions of the Secretary of State under this Part of this Act, not being functions mentioned in subsection (3) below, as may be exercised on his behalf by the Funding Council.

(3) The functions referred to in subsection (2) above are—
- **(a) any power of the Secretary of State under this Part of this Act—**
  - **(i) to make orders or regulations; or**
  - **(ii) to give directions;**
- **(b) the giving of consent by the Secretary of State, other than the giving of consent under section 8(7) or 14 of this Act;**
- **(c) the carrying out of consultation by the Secretary of State under any of sections 3(4), 5(1), 6(2), 8(9), 15(4) and 16(2) of this Act;**
- **(d) the making of a determination by the Secretary of State under section 8(5) of this Act;**
- **(e) the appointment by the Secretary of State of members of the college council in pursuance of Schedule 5 to this Act;**
- **(f) the power of the Secretary of State under section 8(6) of and paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 4 to this Act to require reports and returns to be made and information to be given; and**
- **(g) the giving of notice by the Secretary of State under section 18(2) of this Act.**

(4) For the purposes of subsection (3) above, the functions there specified include such functions as applied or modified in pursuance of an order made under this Part of this Act.

(5) The Funding Council shall, notwithstanding that they are exercising functions on behalf of the Secretary of State, be entitled to enforce any rights acquired, and shall be liable in respect of any liabilities incurred (including liability in damages for wrongful or negligent acts or omissions), in the exercise of those functions in all respects as if the Funding Council were acting as a principal; and all proceedings for enforcement of such rights and liabilities shall be brought by or against the Funding Council in their own name.

(6) Schedule [*The Scottish Further Education Funding Council*] to this Act shall have effect as regards the constitution and supplementary powers of and other matters relating to the Funding Council.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.48 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: Amendment (a) to the new clause, at beginning insert

'with effect from 1st April 1994'.

Government new clause 7—*Advisory functions of the Funding Council.*

Government new clause 8—*Power of Secretary of State as regards functions of the Funding Council.*

Government new clause 20—*Payment of grants, etc. to Funding Council (No. 2).*

New clause 5—*Funding Council timetable—*

'—.The Secretary of State shall publish a timetable by which a Funding Council for Further Education shall be established in Scotland to undertake the functions conferred on the Secretary of State in this part which relate to the provision of further education.'

New clause 19—*Scottish Further Education Funding Council—*

'There shall be established, with effect from 1 April 1993 or any such date thereafter that the Secretary of State may deem appropriate, a body corporate to be known as the Further Education Funding Council for Scotland, which shall
- **(a) assume those duties in respect of further education which are conferred by this Act on the Secretary of State; and**
- **(b) consist of an appropriate number of members who shall be appointed by the Secretary of State having regard to the desirability of including persons who have experience or capability in the provision of education, including experience as a member of a local education authority, or in industrial, commercial or financial matters or the practice of any profession.'**

Government amendments Nos. 84, 14 and 15.

Mr. Forsyth: I said during the consideration of the Bill in Committee that I would table amendments on Report to keep the option open to establish a funding council for further education. While I remain of the view that it would be a mistake to establish such a council, especially at 1 April 1993, I have tabled new clause 6, which would give the Secretary of State by order the power to establish a Scottish further education funding council.

The amendments tabled by the Opposition seek a commitment that a council will be set up at 1 April 1994 or that a firm timetable be established for that. Nineteen ninety-four, however, is likely to be too soon after colleges become self-governing for any Secretary of State to consider the case for establishing such a funding council.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) acknowledged in Committee the need for stability in further education. The duty to secure adequate and efficient provision of further education in Scotland would remain with the Secretary of State, the council being responsible for the actual exercise of the Secretary of State's functions as prescribed by order. That is the best way of ensuring accountability to Parliament. Those functions that cannot be presented and so exercised on his behalf are listed in the new clauses.

Those exemptions involve functions such as the making of orders and regulations, and the giving of directions. They are necessary to protect the Secretary of State because he would be liable for breach of his statutory duties, and it is he who will be accountable to Parliament.

New clause 7 would require the funding council—

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The Minister has been rather helpful on issues involving disabilities and learning difficulties. He will be aware that there are parallel debates on the equivalent English Bill. I am not making a debating point; I am genuinely trying to clarify the issue. Will the Minister explain why new clause 6 does not deal with the responsibility for people with disabilities and learning difficulties?

Mr. Forsyth: I know of the hon. Gentleman's interest in such matters, and when we reach new clauses 11 and 18, perhaps he will want to raise them. There will be an opportunity to discuss those helpful debates and the results of the deliberations about people with special needs. New clause 6 fulfils not my undertakings on people with learning difficulties and special needs but my undertaking to give the Secretary of State powers to establish a buffer body—a funding council to carry out on his behalf the functions which were set out in the Bill as it originally came before the House.

New clause 7 would require the funding council to advise and assist the Secretary of State in connection with his functions and to provide him with

"such information and advice as he may . . . require".

The funding council would also be able to give the Secretary of State

"such information and advice as they think fit as regards the provision of further education . . . in Scotland."

New clause 20 is a funding clause, containing provisions similar to the Secretary of State's power to fund boards of management in clause 4.

Amendment No. 84 sets out provisions in a schedule dealing with such matters as the appointment of members of the council by the Secretary of State, their powers to employ staff and own property, and to prepare reports and accounts. Those provisions mirror similar provisions for the higher education funding council in schedule 6.

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will recognise the significant concession that the amendments represent. They have been introduced because of our wish to ensure that an important option is not closed to further education students and staff. It is in their best interests that the reforms have been brought forward.

I invite the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie to withdraw amendment (a) to new clause 6, which in effect would prevent the Secretary of State from exercising his power to establish by order an FE funding council until 1 April or later. That would limit a future Secretary of State's power to establish such a council earlier, if he so wished, and would therefore be unnecessarily restrictive.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I have mixed feelings at the start of the day's business. First, we have been asked to return to the Bill very quickly. It came out of Committee only last Tuesday. That shows the Government's desire to try to get it through before a general election, but it means that we cannot subject some of the extensive proposals that the Government are making today to the sort of scrutiny that we would wish. That will have to happen in the other place.

On the other hand, I want to express my great appreciation and thanks to the Minister—I say this quite fearlessly—for honouring the commitments that were made in Committee, for which Opposition Members are most grateful. Hon. Members on both sides of the House accept that significant improvements have been made and that the Committee stage was characterised by none of the sterility that is common on such occasions. I also express my appreciation to the Scottish Office civil servants, who must have worked extremely hard to produce the amendments.

It is appropriate to put this debate into the context of the Bill as a whole. We welcome the intentions behind the second half of the Bill—the end of the binary divide and the transfer of control to Scotland. We are pleased with the concessions made in respect of the further education provisions of the Bill, both before it was introduced and during its passage. In the original White Paper, a clear warning was given that the privatisation of the careers service was contemplated, but, before the Bill was introduced, a concession was made and that proposal was withdrawn.

We welcome, too, the fact that the Government soon realised that it would be quite impractical to ask the local authorities to perform only a social and recreational function under the Bill, with the result that there is now a duty on the colleges to provide further education, and a power for local authorities to do so.

We welcome the fact that, throughout the Bill, there is movement towards much greater consultation with local authorities, staff and other bodies. That is a significant step.

We thank the Minister for altering the provisions governing the responsibility for English as a foreign language, and for making it quite clear that that is a college responsibility. I am sure that all members of the Committee—in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke)—will want to express their appreciation for the movement that has been made on those with learning needs.

In particular, we welcome the provision for the establishment of a further education funding council, although we must put that matter in context. Even with the funding council, we regard the dual provision of further education by local authorities and colleges as nonsense. It will simply be extremely confusing. Incoherence is bound to result when the Howie committee's proposals—or the responses to them—about highers and other courses in the upper stages of secondary schools appear.

No further education funding council—or any other body—will be able to implement such proposals in a sensible way, given that, on the one hand, we shall have centrally controlled FE colleges under the control of local business men, while, on the other, we shall have the extensive proposals for post-16s, which I am sure will have their impact on vocational education and which will have to be administered by the local authorities.

We remain convinced that the Bill is motivated by the desire for central control. We must not forget that it had its origins in the Government's desire to keep down the poll tax rather than in any educational consideration, and we object to self-selected boards of business men running further education in an area. We are also apprehensive about the service that will be given to remote areas, at some distance from further education colleges.

We cannot agree with the further education provisions in the Bill. As I pointed out in Committee, the further education funding council was a third or fourth best. We have no commitment to implementing that part of the Bill; a Labour Government would regard the centralisation of control as wrong.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): When the hon. Gentleman referred to areas that are some distance from colleges of further education, was he talking about the rural areas of Scotland? If so, will he elaborate on that? I should be interested to know his thinking on the rural areas, what he proposes to do and where he will find the money.

4 pm

Mr. Worthington: I am referring in some cases, but not necessarily, to rural areas. We are talking about more than 40 colleges, and it is certainly not true to say that every town in Scotland has a college of further education. No one would call Dumbarton, for example, rural, but it does not have a further education college of its own. Many other areas are in the same position.

However, I am talking about remote areas. Clydebank college has out-stations in many parts of Argyll, and is currently seeking to set up a multi-site further education college in the rural parts of Argyll. That can be achieved only by intense collaboration with the local authorities and schools in the area, because their premises will be involved. As I said in Committee, we shall run up against the business bureaucracy of people charging for services.

We would not implement the FE part of the Bill. We recognise that there are deficiencies in the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 and that we need to consult the FE sector if we are to improve that. However, although the Bill has been improved, we cannot make it acceptable to an incoming Labour Government.

As I have said, as we have only just received the detailed new clauses on the FE funding council, we have not had the time to scrutinise them and, because there has been insufficient time, it has not been physically possible to table amendments to those provisions. That will have to be deferred until the Bill is considered in the other place. I hope that their Lordships can cope with that, because the scale of the change is considerable. On first impression, one is concerned that powers have not been——

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Given that the hon. Gentleman argued in Committee that an amendment should be tabled to allow the Secretary of State the power to set up such a funding council, and that I argued against it on the basis that to do so would involve a complicated and lengthy series of amendments, is it not a little disingenuous of him now to argue that it is unfair on the House and him that such amendments have now been tabled? *[Interruption.]* Well, the hon. Gentleman appears to be complaining. We have tabled an amendment that does precisely what the hon. Gentleman sought in Committee. I understood that, if the Bill were to be amended in that way, the hon. Gentleman would be satisfied, so I am now a little disappointed that he appears to be girning about it.

Mr. Worthington: No, I have expressed my appreciation. The Minister has done the right thing, and has produced proposals for a further education funding council. I was simply pointing out that, although we shall not oppose those provisions today, that must not be taken as evidence that we approve of everything in the new clauses. The establishment of a higher education funding council accounted for half the Bill, and we spent five weeks scrutinising it. We recognise that further work needs to be done in the other place to scrutinise the FE funding council.

I should like to give one example of a power that seems conclusive and all-embracing. On first reading—we can give it only a first reading—new clause 20(2) appears to refer to a pretty gargantuan power:

> "A grant or other payment paid under this section may be made subject to such conditions as the Secretary of State thinks appropriate and such conditions—*(a)* may be imposed before, after or at the time such grant or payment is made".

That is an extraordinary proviso. In other words, the conditions under which the funding council gets a grant can be changed after it has received the grant. The new clause continues by saying that such conditions

> "may relate to any time, whether before or after such time."

There may be a simple explanation. I am simply telling the Minister that we are pleased that he has introduced proposals for a further education funding council, but that a great deal of the detail will have to be scrutinised in the other place. When the Minister replies, perhaps he could say what that provision means.

Mr. Forsyth: In introducing the new clauses, I drew the hon. Gentleman's attention to the provisions in clause 4. If he looks at clause 4 he will find exactly the same wording. There is nothing new in this. We discussed the matter in Committee. If he is arguing that this is new and has been sprung upon him, I must tell him that it has been in the Bill from the beginning.

Mr. Worthington: We are talking about a condition that the Secretary of State can impose on a funding council. How can this be exactly the same when previously there was no funding council? There is a change of circumstances.

Mr. Forsyth: This relates to the payment of funds to institutions. The wording in clause 4 is the same. Clause 4(3) states:

> "The terms and conditions on which the Secretary of State may make any grants, loans or other payments under this section may include in particular conditions—
>
> (a) enabling him to require the repayment, in whole or in part, of sums paid by him if any other condition subject to which the sums were paid is not complied with",

and so on. Those provisions applied when the Secretary of State was funding directly. It follows that they must be carried over if a buffer body acts on his behalf. There is nothing new in this. The hon. Gentleman is making a meal of a concession that he requested.

Mr. Worthington: There is a difference between a funding council and a college board of management. A funding council has complete responsibility for the distribution of funding to further education colleges whereas, if I have read the provision correctly—the Minister has not corrected me—the Secretary of State may make a grant to a funding council and change the conditions of that grant at some stage in the future—in other words, after the grant has been made.

We tabled the amendment for a funding council in 1994 because we believed that the Minister accepted the case for a funding council in Committee. The only argument that he advanced against a funding council—he may have others—was that it would be too hurried at present and create confusion. Given the time of year, the fact that no steps have been taken to set up a funding council and the fact that we cannot be as far ahead as I hope we are on the higher education funding council, I fully accept that it would be wrong, disorganising and disorienting for us to set up a funding council in 1993.

We want an assurance from the Minister that he has accepted the case for a funding council and that, having got out of the problem of the rush—the Government have introduced the legislation in that way—he intends at some future date, were his party to remain in office, to introduce one. We want an assurance that this is not simply a sop. Is this a sop, or is it a sign that the Minister has accepted the

[Mr. Worthington]

case for a funding council? The reason for the amendment is to test the Minister and to put a date on the establishment of the funding council, thus demonstrating the Government's commitment.

Mr. Nicol Stephen (Kincardine and Deeside): I echo the words of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and welcome the new clause that has been tabled by the Minister. A lot of detailed work has been done in a short time on the various new clauses and amendments. I welcome the fact that the new clause offers an opportunity for a funding council for further education in Scotland to be established.

We are still uncertain, however, whether the Scottish Office and the Minister intend, in the fulness of time, to proceed with the further education funding council. In Committee, the Minister hesitated about tabling such a new clause, because it might create uncertainty. Obviously, he weighed up in his mind whether the inclusion of such a new clause would be healthy in terms of the unsettling effect it might have on the institutions affected.

I urge the Minister to say not only that the Government may set up, at some unspecified date, the funding council, but that he is committed to doing so. Such a commitment would do a great deal to ease the disruption that will obviously be caused in the transition phase, as institutions move from local authority control to control by the Secretary of State. Many changes will have to be made, and they could be made far more effectively and with less disruption if we knew that a further education funding council was to be established.

I am still unclear as to why the Minister left out the option for a funding council in the first draft of the Bill. A higher education funding council is allowed for in the English and Welsh Bill and is also allowed for in this Bill. I am never one to suggest that we should simply follow what is done in England and Wales, but the proposed funding council for further education was one of the better aspects of the English and Welsh Bill.

I still do not understand the resistance that may exist in the Scottish Office to the establishment of such a council in Scotland. I can only conclude that there is still a desire among Scottish Office Ministers to give emphasis to one of the worst aspects of the Scottish Bill—centralisation. Further and higher education institutions are worried that the Bill will allow significant controls to be exercised directly through the Secretary of State, whether they are political or not. They believe that the interference suggested by the Bill and its centralising aspects should be firmly resisted.

If the Minister is unwilling to commit himself to the establishment of a further education funding council, it will be a signal that the idea of a buffer to distance the Secretary of State from his responsibilities towards further and higher education will be lost. There should be such a buffer, so that people who are engaged in further education and who have the expertise to give proper advice to the Secretary of State have the opportunity to exercise their powers. However, it appears that powers will continue to rest squarely with the Secretary of State, his advisers and civil servants. Great concern will be felt by those in higher and further education if their fear is not overcome as a result of today's debate. This is a good opportunity for the Minister to remove that fear.

We should give a clear signal to everyone involved in further education in Scotland that the Government intend to move towards the establishment of a further education funding council. I am not calling for that commitment to be met on a specific date—it could happen in 1992, 1993 or 1994. However, in due course, the Government should publish a timetable showing that they are moving towards that goal. That signal would provide stability and reassurance to those involved in further education in Scotland. They would then believe that there will be a buffer between them and the direct control to be exercised by the Secretary of State.

The Liberal Democrat party and I are still very much opposed to the principle of centralisation. I see the Bill as nothing but a centralising measure. The Minister argued the opposite case in Committee, but I still see the ultimate responsibility being shifted from local authorities to the Secretary of State. It is another attack on local government. The educational rationale for such a move was never made in advance of the Bill, which leads to deep suspicion among hon. Members that it was proposed to solve the Government's poll tax problems rather than for sound educational reasons. The people of Scotland take it ill if they see their education system being meddled with for non-education reasons.

4.15 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In candour, had it been left to me I would have talked and talked and exhausted the patience of the Government and doubtless of my hon. Friends. I like neither part of the Bill, and I do not think that responsibility for further education should be removed from local authorities, which have, on the whole, managed it well. As I made known to the Committee, I still have reservations about the separation of funding councils.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know what parliamentary life is like and my hon. Friends take a different view.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): There is no disagreement among Opposition Members about the fact that we would not like further education to be taken away from local authorities. We are all at one on that. My hon. Friend and I may, however, be alone in being unenthusiastic about university separation, but that is another matter.

Mr. Dalyell: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. Having made that preamble, my hon. Friends will be relieved to know that my contributions to Report stage will be solely in queston form. It is best to be candid also about who one has consulted. My first question is a result of a telephone conversation with Graham Bowie, chief executive of Lothian region. What safeguards will exist for the independence of a funding council? We shall need athletic Parliamentary Private Secretaries to obtain the answers to all my questions.

My second question follows consultation with a number of people. What professional support, and from whom, will the permanent secretariat and permanent advisers have? Thirdly, how does all that lie with new clause 10 and the submissions to the Scottish Office? Is the funding council to be the creature—it is an unpleasant word, but it is not meant unpleasantly—of the Scottish Office?

My fourth question concerns an extremely important matter—the practical nature of the tendering requirements, for instance, for computer facilities, estate surveying, legal and architectural services, medical advice and supplies. At present, the further education authorities take as much advantage as possible of the economies of scale through the regional councils. As the Minister raises his eyebrow, I recommend my excellent speech on competitive tendering of 20 January in the House. One example is the Minister's letter of 30 January to me about de minimis exemptions. The Secretary of State smiles, but those are practical matters involving extremely important people within the local authorities.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): To be fair to the Minister, he was smiling in response to my question about whose constituency included Renfrew.

Mr. Dalyell: I thank my hon. Friend; I always like to be fair to Ministers.

The letter stated:

"The present de minimis figure of £100,000 reflects our judgment as to the point at which it would not be right to oblige an authority to comply with the accounting and reporting requirements of competitive tendering."

That aspect has to be considered carefully.

My fifth question arises from a conversation that I had yesterday with Tony Godden, the head of the West Lothian college, who has severe reservations about the time scale leading to incorporation and how colleges like his—Bathgate and Livingston—can undertake the services previously carried out by the regional council. At this early stage, will the Minister say how, in practical terms, the changeover is to take place? I hope that the issue will be explained in the other place.

My sixth question arises out of a conversation with Dr. John Watts, the rector of St. Kentigerns, Blackburn. He said that on that day he had 70 pupils at the West Lothian college and Oatridge agricultural college, and the links between the colleges were excellent. But he thought that the links were bound to become more tenuous when the institutions were paid for from different purses and had different bureaucratic structures.

The House will be relieved to hear that I am coming to the end of my list of telephone calls. [HON. MEMBERS: "Next it will be letters."] It is telephone calls on Report and letters in Committee.

My last telephone call was to the head of Oatridge agricultural college, which has been a great help to the agricultural community in Scotland. Chris Nixon said that co-operation could exist, but it would be difficult when co-operation through the normal virement funds ceased. Members who have been on the Public Accounts Committee, as I have, will know all about virement, which is not a recondite issue but a practical one.

Representatives at Oatridge believe that under the proposed set-up the college would have to buy services. At present, the region acts as a clearing house and Lothian region gives the college a great deal of autonomy. But once the new proposals are implemented, school work will be funded and we will face either the impossible position of teachers being paid for doing nothing or the arrangements will cease to exist. Chris Nixon said that he could not envisage the school buying college time unless the college could buy school time. Theoretically, doubtless the colleges can buy school time, but in practice, as all my colleagues know, it is impractical to do so.

I am sorry, I forgot that I made one more telephone call —to Mr. Sellars, the Lothian region's further education expert. He expressed anxiety about the public accountability of the funding council, and in particular who was to look after the strategic planning. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) is chairman of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. There is a view that COSLA should carry out the service. If it is to be implemented by the Scottish Office, we should be told about it.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Before my hon. Friend concludes what some people might describe as the Linlithgow questions, may I point out that there are indeed many in COSLA who would still argue, even at this late stage in our discussions on the Bill—very rushed discussions indeed—that if the Government are determined to take the colleges out of local government, there is still an important role for COSLA. My hon. Friend was right to identify it.

Mr. Dalyell: I should like to know how the Government see that role for COSLA. I should also like to know what I am to say to Oatridge, St. Kentigerns and other people who are involved at a practical level.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The Minister asked my hon. Friend to withdraw amendment *(a)* to new clause 6 which commits the Government to setting up a funding council for Scottish further education. If the new clause goes through without amendment *(a)*, it will empower the Secretary of State to set up such a council. He may do so, but he may decide not to do so. If amendment *(a)* is not carried, the Minister cannot say that he has brought forward the new clause as a concession to the Opposition. He is dressing it up as a concession, but, without amendment *(a)*, if there is a Conservative Government post election—I do not think that will happen, but we should explore the fantasies in case there is—the Secretary of State could decide not to set up a further education council in Scotland. He could say that he had the power but no obligation to do so.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman did not have the pleasure of joining us in Committee. The request which was made to me in Committee was to bring forward amendments to enable the Secretary of State to set up a funding council, on the clear understanding that no commitment was being given that we would wish to do such a thing. When I said in Committee that we had no intention of establishing a funding council in April 1993, I was asked to provide power to enable a future Secretary of State to do so. That is what I have done. I have fulfilled the undertaking to the letter.

Mr. McAllion: The Minister confirms what we are saying, that there is no commitment on behalf of the Secretary of State to set up a funding council.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The Minister is being slightly disingenuous. What we pressed him to do in Committee was to include in the Bill power to set up a funding council. He said that he was against that. We then asked him, if he could not go so far as to meet us in full, to introduce an empowering provision. He has met that part of the commitment, but our main concern was to have the

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

legislation drafted in such a way as to ensure that a funding council would be set up. Therefore, the Minister has not been as generous as he pretends.

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend is right. The Minister is never as generous as he pretends. He seeks consistently to mislead the people of Scotland about the reality of what he and his Government have been about in Scotland in the past 12 to13 years.

Since the Minister is anxious to avoid giving a commitment to set up a further education council, perhaps he could use the opportunity of replying to the debate to rule out a possibility which was raised in the press last year. In May *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, in an article entitled

> "Merging the High and Low Roads",

suggested that further education funding in Scotland could in future be incorporated in the proposed Scottish higher education funding council. If that is not the case, perhaps the Minister will say that it is not the intention of the Government to go down that high road or low road, whatever they wish to call it, and merge further education and higher education in one funding council after the general election. By giving the Secretary of State the power this side of the general election, perhaps he intends to implement such a council after the election.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have had an interesting discussion. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised a number of questions. I hope that I can provide him with the answers in a way that his hon. Friends on the Front Bench were unable to provide answers to questions raised when he was the hon. Member for West Lothian.

The hon. Gentleman's telephone calls raise a number of important questions, the first of which concerns the independence of the funding council. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that we have not given a commitment to establish a funding council: we simply gave a commitment to provide powers for the Secretary of State to do so. Any such council would need to be established and have its functions defined by an order approved by this House. And if there were a proposal to establish a funding council, that would best be done in the context of the further education colleges having acquired self-governing status, having found their feet and having had an opportunity to discuss the respective roles of the funding council and of the Secretary of State.

4.30 pm

The new clauses are designed to set out the structure for a funding council skeleton on which such structures would be built. That is a matter for future debate, certainly not for today when there is quite enough to be done in preparing colleges for self-governing status and ensuring that they have the support and expertise required to enable them to make a success of that. That support is available in the Scottish Office and has been tried and tested in the work that has been done supporting the central institutions. The hon. Member for Linlithgow is only too well aware of how successful the central institutions have been in working with the expertise in the Scottish Office.

Mr. Worthington: The Minister is being unusually diffident. In Committee he conceded that there was a case for a funding council "as a buffer". Right from the start, his counterparts in England and Wales have seen the necessity for a funding council. We accept that the Minister has honoured his commitment; he has brought forward powers to establish a funding council. We are just asking for knowledge of the Minister's attitude to a funding council. Does he think it would be a good thing; is he committed to setting one up?

Mr. Forsyth: We discussed all this in Committee when I set out our position clearly. In the fifth sitting of the Committee on 19 December I had the following to say:

> "It would not be helpful to establish such a council on 1 April 1993 when the colleges become self-governing and will require a period of stability. I told the committee that when the colleges were firmly established under a central funding mechanism, I saw no reason why a funding council should not be considered. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) said in Committee that if the Minister is persuaded that it may be possible to establish a funding council at a future date, why does not the Bill allow the Secretary of State to establish one, given that it would require primary legislation. Since then, the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) has made a persuasive case for including such provisions in the Bill.
>
> I have taken advice about what would be involved in amending the Bill to allow for such a further education council to be established at a later date by a future Secretary of State if he so wished. It will require extensive amendment to the Bill, but given the Committee's progress in considering part I, and given the positive way in which Opposition Members have put their case, I am happy to undertake to table amendments on Report to keep the option open to establish a funding council for further education."—[*Official Report, First Scottish, Standing Committee*, 19 December 1991; c. 156-57.]

That is what I have done. The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) welcomed it. To suggest now that we should commit ourselves to establishing a funding council to carry out certain functions is to change the position that the hon. Gentleman adopted in Committee and my understanding of the Opposition's view——

Mr. Tom Clarke: I share the premise of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) that the timing is academic. I do not expect the Minister to be helpful——

Mr. Robert Hughes: Or even to be here.

Mr. Clarke: I am trying to be as kind as possible to the Minister. Even if the order to which the Minister referred a few minutes ago is introduced, what can the Minister tell us about the Government's thinking on what the timetable will be?

Mr. Forsyth: I did so in Committee. I make the observation that given the Opposition's effort to determine the Government's view two or three years from now, I can only conclude that Opposition Members expect us to be in government after the next general election. If the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) had any confidence that he would be in government, he would know that the Bill would provide him with the power to decide when to establish the council. The Opposition's approach is revealing, although entirely understandable with the way the polls are going.

I said in Committee that I had an open mind on the matter. If we thought that a funding council would be entirely inappropriate, we would never have agreed to include such provisions in the Bill. It is a matter best addressed at a future date in the light of the experience of the self-governing colleges.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked me about the independence of the funding council. The council's functions would be established by order. Obviously, the council would exist to carry out functions on behalf of the Secretary of State, but the duty would remain with the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman asked whether the funding council would be the creature of the Scottish Office and he asked where public accountability would be. Accountability will remain in this place because the Secretary of State will be accountable to the House for the exercise of his duties in the provision of further education. The funding council will have particular functions which will be carried out on his behalf. The new clauses are carefully drafted to ensure that the clear lines of accountability are maintained.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow also asked me about competitive tendering and the tendering process. I am delighted that he sees the benefits of competitive tendering and that he is anxious to ensure that further education colleges should get the best value for money. If colleges want to make arrangements with local authorities about purchasing or about other centrally organised purchasing arrangements, they are free to do so. It is a matter for their boards of management and we should expect them, like all bodies that are publicly funded, to get value for money.

Mr. Dalyell: I bring to the Minister's attention the correspondence between West Lothian district council and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), the Under-Secretary of State, on precisely the difficulties that a council, whether district or regional, has on the whole issue of competitive tendering. This is not the occasion on which to go into detail, but I think that the Minister should be aware of the problem.

Mr. Forsyth: I should be happy to look into that correspondence and to consider the hon. Gentleman's point. The general point is that the colleges would be free to make whatever arrangements seemed best for the provision of services. Centrally organised arrangements are sometimes not appropriate and that point brings me to the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen).

The hon. Gentleman argued that the Bill was a centralising measure. For a Liberal Democrat to argue that giving institutions the power to run their own affairs is a centralising measure is extraordinary. It was even more extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman seemed to think that the measure had something to do with the poll tax. I explained in Committee that the poll tax—[HON. MEMBERS: "Poll tax!"] I have called the community charge the "poll tax" on a number of occasions. We used the term "poll tax" in the famous vulture posters which we have put behind us.

The community charge or poll tax has nothing to do with the arrangements for financing local government. It is clear that the money that will now be provided centrally by my right hon. Friend will not be given to the local authorities. This is a transfer from one account to another. The idea that it would somehow reduce the community charge is erroneous. We have explained the point at great length to the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside, but he keeps making his claim. I do not know whether he does not understand the measure or whether he thinks that he can discredit the idea by associating it with the poll tax. I have no idea how his mind operates in those matters.

The hon. Gentleman also suggested that the measure was an attack on Scottish education. The one point that he left out of his speech was the recognition that the measures have been welcomed by the principals of the colleges concerned. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that he knows better than the people who are responsible for running the colleges who have welcomed the opportunity to be able to take decisions at local level?

The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) criticised me for not giving a clear commitment to setting up a funding council. I have covered that ground in some depth. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not able to join us in Committee because I have enjoyed his contributions in previous Committees of which he has been a member. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would have helped us——

Mr. McAllion: Unlike the Minister, I am not sorry that I was not on the Committee; I am pleased that I missed it. The Minister must have been asleep or doing something else when I raised my final point about the article in the education press in Scotland about the middle of last year. It suggested that the Government intended to merge further education funding with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. Does the Minister discount that possibility?

Mr. Forsyth: I am happy to discount that possibility, together with many other stories which appear in the education press and which are represented as the Government's view. It is regrettable that that happens. The view mentioned by the hon. Gentleman has never been put to me and I did not see the article to which he referred. He can rest easy on that matter.

I hope that the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie will feel able to withdraw his amendment and accept that the Government have fulfilled the undertaking that was freely given as a result of our deliberations on this matter.

Mr. Worthington: I cannot withdraw the amendment, which would set a date for the introduction of a further education funding council. The last exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and the Minister was interesting. An acceptable reason for not introducing an FE funding council—although I do not say that the reason would be either accurate or right—would be if the Government intended to merge it with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. I believe that the Secretary of State was credited with saying that the Government would consider merging the two at some stage. The Minister shakes his head, which shows that that is not in the Government's mind. However, had that been a reason, I could have accepted it.

The possibility of such a merger has now been discounted by the Minister, who has given a solid commitment that no Government of his persuasion would attempt such a merger. What is the Minister's difficulty? Is he or is he not in favour of a further education funding council? It is not a difficult issue. Both the Welsh and the English Ministers have managed to make up their minds on it. We can only reach the conclusion—which will be noted by the further education sector in Scotland—that the reason behind the Government's proposal for a further

[Mr. Worthington]

education funding council is that it might help the Bill's passage. It is quite clear that the Government are not committed to introducing such a council.

There has been no intellectual acceptance of the case for an FE funding council. At the very most, it is an open issue, but, knowing the Minister as I do, I concur with what the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen) said about the Bill being fundamentally a centralising measure. It seeks to keep control with the Secretary of State. Administration will be done by self-appointed business men on boards of management, but the parameters of further education—the fee level, the overall funding and the policy—will be set by central Government.

The Minister did not accept our argument that there is great virtue in having a forum, a central organisation, where the further education world could concentrate its arguments, debate policy and move forward. If the Government are returned to power, because of the inadequacies of this place there will be no scope for public debate on further education.

4.45 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised some extremely interesting issues which we do not have time to debate today but which I hope will be debated in the other place, such as the relationship between the putative funding council and the Scottish Office. At first glance, it would appear to be very much the creature of the Scottish Office, when in fact it should be a buffer acting at arm's length from the Scottish Office.

Another inadequacy about the way that we have to deal with the matter today is that there is not time to debate the issue, which we debated in Committee, about the role of a funding council in strategy and planning. It has a strategic planning function. That debate will have to take place in another place. The issue of academic freedom has been raised both in this place and in the other place—the notorious clauses 36 and 64, which have similar elements in the further education sector, cannot be debated today.

Anyone listening to or reading about the debate will know that the nub of the Government's thinking is that they want the Bill to be passed. Their proposal for a further education funding council does not really have any commitment. Nothing that the Minister has said today convinces me that his heart and his mind have been won over to the case for a funding council. All the Government are doing is providing the power to establish one. People will note that fact with interest. I hope that hon. Members will support our amendment.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman has spoken. He needs the leave of the House to speak a second time.

Mr. Dalyell: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish once again to refer to the St. Kentigern-Oatridge problem, which is repeated in all our constituencies in one form or another, and which I recommend to some diligent Peer in the other place. If institutions are funded from the same general purse, on the whole they mesh together and work easily together. When there is a different purse and a different bureaucratic structure, it is much less easy to have the sort of fruitful relationship that exists between, for example, St. Kentigern's school at Blackburn and the Oatridge agricultural college.

A general problem that might be explored in the other place is how, if there is to be such a separation, we can ensure that fruitful, easy relationships continue to exist. I leave that matter to the other place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Question is, That the clause be read a Second time.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I want to be clear that the House realises what we are doing. I have put the Question on new clause 6. I understand that later the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) wants to press his amendment (a) to a vote.

Question agreed to.

Clause read a Second time.

Amendment (a) proposed to the proposed clause, at beginning insert

["with effect from 1st April 1994"—*[Mr. Worthington.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 178, Noes 254.

Division No. 68] [4.47 pm

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron

Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John

Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas

Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric

Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John

Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil

Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Wood and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause added to the Bill.

New clause 7

ADVISORY FUNCTIONS OF THE FUNDING COUNCIL

'.—(1) Without prejudice to section *[The Scottish Further Education Funding Council]* of this Act, the Funding Council shall provide to the Secretary of State advice and assistance in connection with such of his functions under this Part of this Act as he may, from time to time, determine.

(2) The Funding Council shall provide to the Secretary of State such information and advice as he may, from time to time, require as regards the provision of further education (within the meaning of section 1(5)(b) of the 1980 Act) in Scotland.

(3) The Funding Council may provide to the Secretary of State such information and advice as they think fit as regards the provision of further education (within the meaning of section 1(5)(b) of the 1980 Act) in Scotland.

(4) Advice, assistance or information provided by the Funding Council in pursuance of this section shall be provided in such manner as the Secretary of State may, from time to time, determine.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 8

POWER OF SECRETARY OF STATE AS REGARDS FUNCTIONS OF THE FUNDING COUNCIL

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may give the Funding Council directions of a general or specific character with regard to the discharge of their functions, other than their functions under section *[Advisory functions of the Funding Council]* of this Act; and it shall be the duty of the Funding Council to comply with such directions.

(2) A direction given under subsection (1) above may be varied or revoked by a subsequent direction so given.

(3) Nothing in section *[Scottish Further Education Funding Council]* of this Act or in any order made under that section shall be taken to prohibit the exercise by the Secretary of State of any function conferred on him by this Part of this Act whether or not such function has been or has purported to have been exercised by the Funding Council in pursuance of that section or any such order.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 10

COLLEGE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

'.—(1) Every board of management shall, not later than such date in every financial year as the Secretary of State may determine, submit to the Secretary of State a college development plan in respect of their college.

(2) The college development plan shall be prepared in respect of the academic year commencing in the next following financial year and the succeeding two academic years.

(3) The college development plan shall contain a statement of—

- **(a) the number of persons the board estimates will be students of the college;**
- **(b) the programmes of learning of further education (within the meaning of section 1(5)(b) of the 1980 Act) which the board proposes to provide or secure the provision of;**
- **(c) the capital expenditure proposed by the board and their estimate of the recurrent expenditure and income of the college; and**
- **(d) such other matters as may be determined by the Secretary of State,**

as regards each academic year to which the plan relates.

(4) In preparing their development plan, a board of management—

- **(a) shall have regard to any guidance issued to them by the Secretary of State; and**
- **(b) shall consult with the education authority in whose area the college is situated and the local enterprise company for the area in which the college is situated,**

and in this subsection 'local enterprise company' has the meaning given by paragraph 3(5) of Schedule 1 to this Act.

(5) A development plan prepared in pursuance of this section shall be in such form as the Secretary of State may determine.

(6) Any power of the Secretary of State under this section to make a determination may be exercised differently in respect of different colleges.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5 pm

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 66, in clause 8, page 5, line 3, at end insert

'and to this end the board of management shall be required to provide an annual college development plan, which plan shall be submitted to the education authority and the local enterprise company in whose area the college is situated for consultation.'.

Mr. Forsyth: The new clause fulfills an undertaking that I gave in Committee. I acknowledged the desirability of boards of management continuing to prepare college development plans. We had proposed to deal with that by making it a condition of grant, but to avoid ambiguity I am happy to make it a clear statutory requirement.

The plans will have to be prepared annually and will cover the next three full consecutive academic years. The contents of the plan will have to include such matters as a statement of the number of students expected to be enrolled at the college, the further education programmes that are proposed to be provided or arranged and financial estimates. In preparing the plan the board will have to consult the education authority and the local enterprise company for the college's area. I acknowledge that they have a legitimate interest. That consultation should prove valuable to the boards in drawing up their plans.

On the basis of the new clause, I invite Opposition Members not to move amendment No. 66, which has a similar effect.

Mr. Worthington: We are delighted that the Minister has moved the new clause and are therefore prepared not to move our amendment.

The proposals arose during our debates in Committee. We constantly referred to the importance of greater openness about what colleges are doing. All that we wanted was the Minister's assurance that the college development plans will be published and that people will have the opportunity to influence them. There should be no secrecy about them. I am glad to have received the Minister's wholehearted and enthusiastic assurance that these will be public documents and that people will be able to influence the operation of boards of management. Therefore, I welcome new clause 10.

Mr. Dalyell: On the question of commercial confidentiality, particularly in relation to subsection (4)(b) of new clause 10, do the Government recognise that in certain circumstances there could be a problem over maintaining commercial confidentiality in relation to local enterprise companies? Has that been taken into account?

Mr. Forsyth: There is always a dilemma between carrying out consultation and making as much information as possible public and maintaining commercial confidentiality. The normal rules would apply. Judgment would have to be exercised as to what should be classed as commercially confidential. We cannot, however, deal with that on the face of the Bill. It concerns the good conduct of business, which I am sure that we can trust the local authorities, the local enterprise companies and the boards of management of the colleges concerned to carry out.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 11

DUTY OF BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT AS REGARDS RECORDED CHILDREN

'. A board of management shall, when requested to do so by an education authority in whose area their college is situated, provide to the authority as soon as is reasonably practicable such information or advice as the authority may reasonably request from the board to facilitate the carrying out by the authority of their duty under section 65B of the 1980 Act (provision for recorded children over school age) to consider in relation to any recorded child what provision would benefit him after he ceases to be of school age and to make a report thereon.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 18—*Future needs assessment*—

'.—(1) Section 65B of the 1980 Act (Future Provision for Recorded Children) shall be amended as follows:—

(2) After subsection (4) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(4A) If it appears to the education authority that the child may benefit from further education after he ceases to be of school age, the education authority may invite the board of management of a further education college to assist them in performing their duty under subsection (1) above, and the board of management shall co-operate in rendering such assistance as is reasonable in the circumstances".

(3) In subsection (6) after the word "resides" there shall be added—

"(bi) the board of management of any further education college making provision from which, in their opinion, he might benefit".'—

and Government amendment No. 82.

Mr. Forsyth: New clause 11 and Government amendment No. 82 fulfil an important undertaking that I gave in Committee. The effect of new clause 11 would be to require boards of management to provide information or advice to education authorities, following a request to assist authorities in carrying out their duties under section 65B of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Under this section, education authorities must consider, in relation to each recorded child belonging to their area, what provision would benefit that child after he ceases to be of school age. Amendment No. 82 makes clear that boards of management are included in the categories of bodies to which education authorities may send a copy of their report on what provision would benefit a recorded child after he ceases to be of school age.

Further education colleges have an important role in the provision of continuing education for those with learning difficulties. The amendments underline our commitment to those students. I hope that Opposition Members will accept that the amendments have the same effect as new clause 18, which I invite them not to press.

Mr. Dalyell: When I saw the new clause on the Amendment Paper I made inquiries, as is my custom, of two West Lothian headmasters, both of whom made the same point: did the Government realise what expense could be involved in recorded children?

All hon. Members realise that there are children with special needs and would not begrudge money being spent on those who are recorded, but do the Government not understand that they may be involving education authorities and others in fairly considerable expense in relation to recorded children? Do they have any immediately available figures of the average cost of recorded pupils? I understand that in a big school of about 1,000 pupils there are about five recorded children. In some areas the figure may be slightly more. I am told that this is a legitimate question to put to the Government.

Mr. Tom Clarke: New clause 18 was tabled in the name of my hon. Friends and myself, following the discussions in Committee. I welcome new clause 11 and the Minister's comments.

We have to accept that education, including further education, is an important aspect of community care when dealing with young people with disabilities or learning difficulties. I fully understand, since the Minister was kind enough to write to me, that the rules of the House do not allow us to go into too much detail about community care. In his letter to me on 28 January of this year, the Minister said:

> "I hope you will accept that we have fully explored the possibility of amendments in this area. I recognise the importance of boards of management co-operating and producing information to local authorities carrying out

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

community care assessments. I propose, therefore, that a circular be issued to boards recommending that they do so. You raised in the debate the desirability of consulting those involved in the community care working group. I am happy *to give an undertaking that in drawing up the circular to* boards the Scottish Office Education Department will consult with this group."

I welcome that and thought it was important to put it on the record because the spirit of new clause 18 is covered by new clause 11.

My hon. Friends and I are genuinely interested in co-operation in the interests of proper assessment for the individual—the child or the young person—so that we can deal with his further education needs. It is important that this should not be seen merely as an exchange of paper. We all know—and this emerged during our discussions in Committee—that it is very difficult to put a duty to co-operate into legislation, but we hope that the measure will lead to all of the agencies dealing with recorded children working together.

The Minister has accepted the arguments that we made in Committee and has honoured his commitment to table a new clause—in this case, new clause 11. We have made our points and, subject to the important consultations with the Scottish care in the community working group, and, in fairness, having seen a substantial concession to our arguments, we shall not pursue new clause 18.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), and welcome the progress that has been made since the Committee stage. Clearly, this is an important clause for people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

As my hon. Friend said, further education is an important part of community care. However, it can be more than that—it can be an important part of the development of a disabled person or of someone with learning difficulties in terms not only of the tangible education benefits but of the self-esteem which can develop from such education. Before coming to the House, I worked in the training of people with learning difficulties. Another important benefit which disabled people often get from being in a college environment is that of being integrated with people who do not have learning difficulties or disabilities.

Social work departments and education departments are co-operating to provide the necessary services, but I am not clear how we can ensure continuing co-ordination and co-operation under the new set-up. It is important to define whose duty it is to provide the required services. Some students who are partially sighted or completely visually impaired may feel that they need Braille facilities or special computers. Who will be responsible for providing them—the social work department, the education department, or the college? The same applies to signers for the deaf and to aids and readers for people with dyslexia.

Physical access is also a problem. Mobility can be one of the greatest barriers to education for disabled people. Sometimes they cannot get access to the college or, within the college, to the department or course that they wish to attend. We must clear up the problem of co-ordination and decide on whom the duties and responsibilities fall.

Many disabled people attend college because they are training for work. Others attend for the general educational benefit. It is important that we get it right, because disabled people are three times more likely to be unemployed and, if they are employed, several times more likely to be low-paid and low-skilled. Therefore, we have a duty to ensure that education provision is not only promised but delivered.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) for his kind remarks. We agree about the importance of providing throughout the education service proper support for people with recorded needs. I also agree with much of what the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) said.

Uncharacteristically, I must tell the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that this is not a matter in which expenditure consequences should be the main consideration. We are dealing with a group of people who are entitled to proper provision and a proper safety net at a proper level. Experience suggests that the reforming measures pursued by the Government have greatly expanded the opportunities, although I agree that it is important to recognise the resource consequences.

A good example has been the difficulties experienced in some areas with the provision of, for example, speech therapy services, of which I know the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) is aware. I have asked my officials to work closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to try to deal with some of the resource difficulties. We are making available about £2 million, which will be provided on a contract basis for health boards.

Rather than local authorities simply taking the view that this is an expensive and difficult problem, the issues must be faced and proper provision made. That was the original intention when Parliament passed the legislation to provide for recorded needs. I know that local authorities of whatever political hue do their best to meet the requirements and I believe that the legislation has been of immense benefit.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) for his offer to withdraw the new clause, and I hope that the House will support new clause 11.

Mr. Dalyell: I agree with the Minister. There is no argument between us that, in this particular circumstance, expense is not the paramount consideration. That was why I phrased my question rather carefully when I asked whether any facts were easily available about the likely cost of the needs of recorded children. Perhaps I should have known, but, to put it bluntly, I did not.

May I raise another issue following the Minister's answer, which should be dealt with at this stage? The Scottish Community Education Council wanted to table an amendment to clause 2(b) so that it would read:

> "The duty remaining with education authorities in respect of further education shall include community education which encompasses adult education, youth work, and the educational aspects of community development."

Why does the Bill not place on local authorities an explicit duty to provide community education?

The educational value of youth work in Scotland which forms an integral part of community education is unquestioned, so why does not the Bill explicitly recognise the duty to provide community education? The Minister may say that that duty is implicit in the Bill, but Esther Roberton and her colleagues at the council—I confess to another telephone call this morning—took a rather different view. I think that they at least deserve an answer.

The athletic Parliamentary Private Secretary has returned——

Mr. Worthington: Arthritic?

Mr. Dalyell: No, not arthritic—athletic. The athletic PPS has returned, so perhaps we may by pigeon post get an answer that will deal with the concerns of the Scottish Community Education Council. The Minister will have had its brief, which is in the form of an amendment, to add in page 2, line 12, the words that I quoted. The Scottish Community Education Council says that that amendment would ensure that the duty remaining with education authorities to provide community education was clear.

Currently, under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, education authorities have a duty to secure

"adequate and efficient provision of school education and further education".

Under that Act, further education includes voluntary, part-time and full-time courses of instruction for persons over school age, and social, cultural and recreational activities, and physical education and training, either as voluntary organised activities designed to promote the education and development of persons taking part therein, or as part of a course of instruction. It also includes the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas.

The Bill broadly confines the duty to be transferred to boards of management of further education colleges, to courses of vocational education and training, and to access to such courses. The duty to provide community education as currently offered remains with education authorities.

Throughout the proceedings——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, but I am finding it difficult to relate what he is saying to the new clauses and amendment under discussion.

Mr. Dalyell: Perhaps I have chanced my arm a bit far, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have certainly done my best for the Scottish Community Education Council, whose brief is with the Scottish Office. Surely the Minister has now had time to give a considered judgment on it.

Mr. Wilson: I shall make a brief contribution. In general terms, if what is proposed is good enough for my hon. Friend the Members for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), it is good enough for me.

In listening to the Minister, I heard the enunciation of an important principle. Talking of the five children in a thousand, he said that money did not matter, and that nothing was too good for them. I ask him directly whether that description comes within 100 miles of the present situation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I had hoped that I might be rescued with some advice on the questions asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), which I believe related to an amendment on community education which Mr. Speaker did not select. However, I was given a piece of paper telling me that those questions were outwith the scope of the amendment.

I believe that I can help the hon. Gentleman a little by saying that we remain committed to community education, and that it seems to me appropriate that it should be the responsibility of the local authority.

I believe that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) embroidered my words slightly, but certainly the spirit was there. We have made considerable progress. In the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989, we provided for an extension of choice for parents of children with special needs, and, for the first time, we provided funding to be made available through local authorities on a discretionary basis for children who require special provision not available in this country and who therefore have to go to centres overseas. Local authorities have done well in the development of integrated provision in schools, in the expansion of services, and in making physical alterations to meet special needs.

There will always be more to be done, and, obviously, that has to be done within the context of resources. I was expressing my personal view on the priorities—that such children are one group who should be at the front of the queue.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I have only just come in, but I have had some personal experience of the subject, and I should like to say that children recorded as having learning difficulties are not only those with obvious physical or mental disabilities. There are within our normal schools children with specific learning difficulties. It is best to record them, because then they can be identified and money can be spent on them within the normal school system. We are not talking about only five children in a hundred, or whatever number the Minister mentioned.

Mr. Forsyth: Indeed, the hon. Gentleman is right. There are also people with learning difficulties who are not recorded, and who should never be recorded; they do not have special needs. The emphasis in the five-to-14 programme, in reporting and—dare I say it—in testing, is to help to identify needs and see that they are met at an early stage.

I believe that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North was referring to children with special needs who are recorded, and implicit in what he said was the idea that services were not yet of the standard that everyone in the House would like to see.

Mr. McMaster: Will the Minister clarify part of his earlier answer that puzzled me? If a young adult with learning difficulties—say, someone who cannot read and write—wanted to get a job, and so wanted to enter a further education college but could not do so because he had not the basic skill of literacy, and attended a basic literacy course in the community to acquire those skills and to allow him to go to college, would that course be the responsibility of the college, and therefore funded by the college, or would it be an education department responsibility, and therefore funded by the local authority?

Mr. Forsyth: That would be entirely a matter for the college concerned. It could be either. There is no reason why the college could not provide such a service, and it might be encouraged to do so. Equally, the service could be provided through the local authority, perhaps through the secondary school system in the normal way.

[Mr. Forsyth]

I believe that there is agreement that it is desirable for such a facility to be available, and that there ought to be co-operation between local authorities and colleges of education to ensure that it is provided. I believe that the Bill provides for that.

I do not wish to detain the House any longer on this matter. I conclude, in response to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, by saying that there is a great deal to do. This sector does not always have its advocates in pressure groups—although those who represent people with learning difficulties do a splendid job. We did well in our deliberations in Committee. Hon. Members from both sides of the House contributed, and I hope that the new clause accommodates the points that were made in Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 20

PAYMENT OF GRANTS, ETC. TO FUNDING COUNCIL (NO. 2)

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may pay to the Funding Council in respect of any expenditure incurred or to be incurred by them in connection with their functions under or by virtue of this Part of this Act grants or other payments of such amounts as he may determine.

(2) A grant or other payment paid under this section may be made subject to such conditions as the Secretary of State thinks appropriate and such conditions—

(a) may be imposed before, after or at the time such grant or other payment is made; and

(b) may relate to any time, whether before or after such time.

(3) The terms and conditions on which the Secretary of State may make any grants or other payments under this section may include in particular conditions—

(a) enabling him to require the repayment, in whole or in part, of sums paid by him if any other condition subject to which the sums were paid is not complied with; and

(b) requiring the payment of interest in respect of any period during which a sum due to him in accordance with any other condition remains unpaid,

but shall not relate to the application by the Funding Council of any sums derived otherwise than from the Secretary of State.

(4) A condition imposed in pursuance of subsection (2) above shall not have effect as regards anything done, or omitted to have been done, before the date the condition was imposed.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

STUDY OF THE HISTORY, LANGUAGES AND CULTURE OF SCOTLAND

'The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council shall pay particular regard in its funding and in its assessment of the quality of education provided by relevant institutions to the need to ensure that appropriate funds and attention are devoted to the study of the history, languages and culture of Scotland.'.—*[Mrs. Ewing].*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take new clause 2—*Fundamental research*—

'The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council shall pay particular regard in its funding and in its assessment of the quality of education provided by relevant institutions to the need to ensure that appropriate funds and attention are devoted to fundamental research.'.

Mrs. Ewing: The new clause stands in the name of my hon. Friends and myself, and the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I say at the outset that it is unusual for the hon. Member for Linlithgow and the Scottish National party to be in full agreement, but in this case we are, and I welcome his support.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I cannot resist intervening to ask whether the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Linlithgow at least agree on their opposition to devolution.

Mrs. Ewing: The Minister will have to ask the hon. Member for Linlithgow what his view is on his official party policy. I certainly endorse my party's policy of independence, but that may be a debate for another occasion. I look forward to discussing it in the Scottish Grand Committee in Edinburgh in the near future.

Through new clause 1, we say that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, which the SNP has fully endorsed on Second Reading and in Committee, should, in its funding and in its assessment of the quality of education, have regard to the distinctive history, languages and culture of Scotland. That seems an important aspect of the responsibilities of such a council, given the importance attached to those matters by all of us in Scotland.

I hope that I can count on the support of Conservative Members for the importance that we in Scotland attach to those traditions.

On Second Reading and throughout the Committee stage, there was general agreement that giving Scotland the facility to examine the funding and assessment of its higher education system was in itself a step forward and, in tabling the new clause, my hon. Friends and I hoped to build on that philosophy.

On Second Reading and in Committe, however, we were not aware of the current crisis surrounding the chair of Scottish history at Edinburgh university. The Government's funding policy will create a further crisis, and we wish to avoid that.

5.30 pm

Over the past few weeks, all hon. Members will have received correspondence both from the student action committee and from various people in Scotland who are deeply concerned about the future of the chair of Scottish history. I have read with great care the documentation that has been sent to me. I noted from a letter published by the principal of Edinburgh university, Sir David Smith, that only some £30,000 was needed to keep the chair going. In the context of Government spending, that is not even peanuts; it is half a peanut. I hope that the Minister will say that the Government are prepared to commit themselves to making available as little as £30,000 so that we can retain that important chair in our capital city.

There has been much outrage in Scotland about the possible loss of the chair. The letters that we have received suggest that it is all a matter of balancing commitment to income, but, in my view, there is an obligation on all the higher education institutions in Scotland to have particular regard to the roots from which they have grown. Surely a nation which has a history as proud and distinct as Scotland's should not be deprived of that facility in its capital city.

It is time to look beyond the balancing of the books. We should state clearly in the Bill that we will recognise our traditions in Scotland—our history, our various languages and our culture.

The Sir William Fraser chair is highly regarded throughout Scotland and the international community. It is interesting to note that, last Wednesday, in a packed meeting, the faculty of art unanimously passed a motion recommending that the chair of Scottish history should not be frozen but should be filled immediately. I understand that the dean informed the meeting that the existing endowment for the period is about £14,957—rather more than a third of the total, including other costs, needed to fund the chair. At the same meeting, Professor Dickinson, who holds the Sir Richard Lodge chair of British history, stated that there was undoubtedly a clear demand for Scottish history courses from abroad as well as from within Great Britain. He also emphasised the increasing demand for the teaching of Scottish history in schools.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Like all Opposition Members, I strongly support the hon. Lady's objective, and I accept that the fundamental problem is Government underfunding, of Edinburgh university in particular. But because of the importance of the chair to Scotland's wider cultural interests, would it not be appropriate for the Secretary of State for Scotland to make informal representations to Edinburgh university—notwithstanding the fact that direct responsibility for such matters lies with the Secretary of State for Education and Science?

Mrs. Ewing: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I hope that the Secretary of State for Scotland will not allow the matter to be brushed aside to the Department of Education and Science—particularly against the background of a Bill dealing with the future of higher education in Scotland. Scottish Ministers have a responsibility to make their voices heard, along with those of academics and individuals throughout Scotland and elsewhere in the world who have commented on the question.

As one who taught history, among other subjects, in the school system in Scotland, and as a graduate of history from both Glasgow and Strathclyde universities, I have found it extremely difficult to establish many sources of information on aspects of Scottish history tied in with the curriculum. One of the specialties that I taught in O-grade history was the post-Napoleonic era. We looked at social and economic change in Britain during that period, which was a time of great upheaval. Every child could find a textbook that referred specifically to the 1819 Peterloo massacre, and everyone understood what happened there, but, when it came to the 1820 martyrs who were executed in the constituency of the Minister responsible for education in Scotland, it was extremely difficult to find material with which to teach the children.

I taught in Stirling and it seemed to me ludicrous that it should be so hard for teachers to find any such information. Fortunately, the situation has changed slightly, partly as a result of the research undertaken at Edinburgh and at other universities with chairs in Scottish history. We must encourage such research, given the growing demand for the teaching of Scottish history in schools.

I am not adopting a narrow attitude. Every French child grows up with a knowledge of French history, every Spanish child with a knowledge of Spanish history, and every American child with a knowledge of American history. There are still far too many Scottish youngsters without any real knowledge or understanding of their own history, cultural identity or linguistic traditions. The Scottish Office has a responsibility to argue the case clearly with the authorities at Edinburgh university and also to accept the new clause, which places a clear responsibility on the Higher Education Funding Council to take due cognisance of those matters.

One of the great poems of Hugh MacDiarmid—the centenary of whose birth we are celebrating—contains a wonderful phrase:

"The present's theirs, the past and future ours".

There is a new renaissance in Scotland—a new interest in the past, which helps people to understand their present circumstances and make decisions about their future. In discussing the new clause, we should be recognising the validity of the words of Hugh MacDiarmid and thus showing our respect to a man who, through his life and work, has brought so much to the Scottish community.

There is also, from Edinburgh university, the wonderful towering poem of Hamish Henderson of the school of Scottish studies:

"But there's mair nor' a rauch win' blowin',
Through the Great Glen o' the world the day."

If there is a new wind sweeping through the glens of the world, we have a responsibility to recognise our past and give it the respect to which it is entitled.

In Committee, we debated in full what all of us regarded as the responsibility of our universities for research. Thus, new clause 2 would include in the Bill a matter on which there was consensus in Committee and provide that research should be given full academic freedom and recognised as an important aspect of university life. I hope that the Minister will respond to our pleas.

Mr. Robert Hughes: There can be no doubt that, on the fact of it, new clause 1 is worth supporting. I, too, want to give my full support to the chair of Scottish history at the University of Edinburgh. The reasons that have been advanced for the suspension of that post do not really stand up and this sorry episode should not have happened simply for the sake of the paltry sum of a few thousand pounds in bookkeeping terms.

However, before we support the new clause, we need some assurance from its mover, the parliamentary leader of the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). I entirely agree that history is important. People should be aware and proud of their history and culture. However, history is not simply a matter of recalling a catalogue of dates about when certain things happened. It is about looking at events and interpreting them. It is about looking at causes as well as effects. I stress that that must be carried out objectively.

We must leave academics to carry out their research into history and to produce their learned treaties and papers. When teaching history to their students, they should make it clear that there can often be more than one

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

interpretation of what happened at any particular time. Historians at the time of an event will have a different interpretation of it from those who will come in the future.

The whole idea of university education is not to put a narrow philosophy into people's minds, which they can then regurgitate when they sit their exams and produce what they have been taught on paper. That is contrary to the whole idea of education at every level—whether at primary and secondary school or university and further education—apart, that is, from the sciences, which involve specific matters on which there can be little or no interpretation. In teaching people their history and culture, we should be trying to give them an open mind so that they can look at what is happening and make their own judgment.

Therefore, if we insist that there should be proper provision in universities for the teaching of Scottish history and culture, I hope that there will be no bullying or pressure put on academics to accept as orthodox that which the Scottish National party happens to believe is Scottish history on any one day. That would be extremely dangerous. Indeed, I believe that the SNP is following a dangerous course. Either wittingly or unwittingly—and I am sorry to say that I believe that it is doing so wittingly—the SNP is stirring up anti-English feeling in Scotland. That is highly dangerous, and its members should put a stop to it as soon as possible.

It is no use continually blaming the English for all Scotland's problems and ills. The slogan "They've got ours" sounds very nice, but it clearly implies that all our problems are caused by the English. We are told that the union of the crowns and of the Parliaments has brought to Scotland nothing but poverty, misery, unemployment, bad housing and, indeed, every evil that we all reject. Not so very long ago the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) used to tell us that the evils that afflict our society in Scotland were inflicted on us by Scottish capitalists.

There is no evidence to suggest that Scottish landowners, shipowners, pitowners and industrialists behaved any less harshly to their workers than their English or Welsh counterparts. I still believe strongly that the ills that the people of Scotland suffered were caused by those who ran the capitalist society. The Union is neither here nor there in that argument. I do not pretend to be a great historian, but I do not know of any strong parallel in England for the highland clearances, although there may be some analogies——

Mr. Wilson: I agree strongly with what my hon. Friend is saying, but apart from the history of the tyranny of Scotland's indigenous capitalism, does my hon. Friend agree that many other parts of the world have good reason to take a historical view of the Scots as imperialists and industrialists? One does not need to go any further than the areas of Britain that were owned by the Bute family—a very Scottish industrial family—to realise that one would not get many votes for the humanity or superior intelligence of the Scots in the areas where that family held sway.

5.45 pm

Mr. Hughes: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Although I do not want to trespass on the time of the House by going wider on that subject, I should point out that there is a great debate among historians about whether the true purpose of imperialism and colonialism was to spread Christianity and civilisation or to spread commerce. I have no doubt that it was for commerce. All the evidence suggests that the nationality of the colonialists was not important. Whether they were Scottish, English, German, French or Belgian made no difference——

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Or American.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, or American in more recent times. Nationality made no difference. Philosophy, not nationality, was what was important. That is why I believe that the SNP has made such a fundamental error, but it all depends on what the SNP says tomorrow, because it said different things yesterday and on the day before that. We are now told that there will be a great future for the Scottish working class if we jump into the same bed as the very people who inflicted those evils upon us in the past. We are now to cuddle up to the Scottish industrialists, financiers and house owners who will put everything right in the new millenium if the SNP gets its way—*[Interruption.]* The SNP must make up its mind. It is either the Scottish socialist republican party or the Scottish Poujadist party. It must be one or the other. The SNP cannot have it both ways, much as it tries to do so. The sooner that all this is exposed, the better. The SNP must be aware that its great danger is excessive zeal. I have forgotten the exact quotation from Senator Goldwater——

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): "Moderation in the pursuit"——

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) obviously remembers the exact quotation. We all know that excessive zeal is the cause of a great deal of unrest and unhappiness, and that it brings with it disasters untold.

In the developments in the Soviet Union, we are seeing the rise of the narrow nationalist fascism that we all thought had gone. I do not want to discuss the merits or otherwise of the Soviet Union, but whatever else one may think about it, I make no bones about saying that I wish that its education system had been able to eradicate antagonism among its people. What has happened in the Soviet Union shows, if nothing else, that attempts to drive concepts into people do not bring about a change of mind or heart, but simply suppress the original feelings.

That is why I believe that my argument for open discussion and debate and for a lack of pressure to be placed on academics in the area of Scottish history and culture is all the more important. The SNP must realise that blaming the English for all our ills is just one step away from blaming the Jews and the Pakistanis—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it is as close as that. If the SNP does not understand that, it understands nothing about the dangerous side of nationalism. That is why I am totally opposed to the SNP.

The great sadness of all this is that Scotland has a great history of internationalism. Yes, much of its history is of exploitation, but the Scottish working class has always had a great tradition of internationalism—of brotherhood, sisterhood and comradeship. But all that will be set aside if we take the narrow path of always blaming somebody else. I am referring to the hundreds of years of history against which the Labour party, the early trade unionists and the early socialists fought. We fought against such evils not because we were Scots but because we made common cause with the English and the Welsh working classes as we sought to avoid those evils. I can recall the days when we stood firm on that and stood together.

The SNP is now taking a despicable road and unless I can have an absolute assurance that it rejects all the fascist stuff that is now coming from it—and soon—I shall have some difficulty in supporting new clause 1.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I support new clause 1, tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and her hon. Friends, and everything that she has said.

The question about the chair of Scottish history at Edinburgh university is not a party political matter; it concerns us all. The university lecturers would not take it kindly if an imputation was made that they were teaching a particular philosophy and that they were not open minded and even handed in teaching their students. I know sufficient about the department to say that its staff are talented and open minded.

The new clause is particularly pertinent because of the announcement by the central management group of Edinburgh university not to replace the professor for up to two years. That is a worry. Could that mean two years, five years or even 10 years? We must take that into consideration. The proposal is so extraordinary and insensitive that it is difficult to believe even that it can be contemplated by Edinburgh university in Scotland's capital city, which has available all the research facilities of the Scottish Record Office and the national library of Scotland.

The Department has already been reduced to four members. The equivalent department at Glasgow university still has six members of staff and St. Andrew's university—the Minister's old university—has six members of staff. I believe that Aberdeen university has just established its first chair of Celtic.

Mr. Dalyell: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Lady because she is making a serious speech. Would she reconsider the use of the word "insensitive"? People at Edinburgh university to whom I have talked are hurt at being accused of being insensitive. They face desperate problems and they are not insensitive to this matter.

Mrs. Michie: Those people may be hurt, but we must make it clear that it is extraordinary that it should be the professorship of Scottish history that is for the chop or is to be put aside for two years. If they do not take that into consideration, they are being insensitive.

The new clause points out that the funding council must pay particular regard to ensuring that appropriate funds are devoted to the study of Scottish history. The hon. Lady told the House the sum required and the sum endowed by Sir William Fraser. If the chair is not filled, what will happen to the £15,000 endowment funds? Where will they go? Will they go into a central treasury box of the university?

The chair and department of Scottish history at Edinburgh university are prestigious. The department has seen a remarkable and most welcome growth in the number of students from home and abroad wishing to study Scottish history. I cannot express too strongly my dismay. Who are these people? They must be so out of touch——

Mr. Dalyell: They are not.

Mrs. Michie: They must be so out of touch and so distanced from what Scots consider important if they can contemplate such a move.

Mr. Dalyell: That is not fair.

Mrs. Michie: Hon. Members may say that that is not fair, but we must state that clearly in the House today.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The hon. Lady has mentioned the university in my constituency. I would be much happier with what she was saying if she would recognise that a contributory factor to Edinburgh university's financial problem is the financial regime under which the Government are forcing it to operate. The university is in an invidious position. It is having to choose between all sorts of posts. I, too, want to see that chair reinstated and the post filled, but she must not allow the Government off the hook by blaming the university without accepting that the root cause of the problems at Edinburgh and all our universities is the Government's funding regime.

Mrs. Michie: I accept that the Government's policies have made it extremely difficult for higher education institutions and universities to operate in Scotland. Nevertheless, the decision is for the university authorities. For me and millions of Scots the priority is the Scottish history department.

The hon. Lady talked about Scottish history being taught in schools. Many of us, particularly my generation, still feel a deep regret that so little Scottish history was taught in schools in our time. Although that has improved a bit, it has not improved enough. I cannot forget and nor can many others the deliberate damage done historically to the Gaelic language when it was forbidden in schools and playgrounds. To this day thousands still cannot pursue their scholastic careers in their mother tongue. Do not let us repeat the same mistakes as before. If the decision is not reversed and the chair filled forthwith, the university will be diminished in the eyes of Scotland and the world.

Nobody should underestimate the feeling about this. We care about our culture, traditions and history, and we have hopes for the future. I welcome the support of the important faculty of arts. At a meeting on 29 January it gave its unanimous backing to filling the chair. I hope that the Secretary of State and the Minister will use their undoubted influence in this matter and will speak to the authorities at Edinburgh university, conveying the genuine concern felt in the House tonight.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I support the new clause in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and other hon. Members. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work in highlighting this issue as assiduously as he has done with many other issues on behalf of not just Edinburgh university but other universities.

This is a serious matter that goes beyond the chair of Scottish history. That chair is not the only one vacant at Edinburgh university. I am only sorry that some Johnnies-come-lately have jumped on the bandwagon to save the chair of Scottish history when last year, when the chair of Russian was frozen, we did not hear one peep from them.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Not true.

Mr. Griffiths: It is very much true.

I welcome the support for the chair of history from other parties, but I would welcome their support also for the other 30 chairs that are vacant out of the 100 or so established professorial chairs at Edinburgh university. I would welcome their support for the vacant chairs of astronomy, bacteriology, conservative dentistry, crop production, English literature, African literature, molecular parasitology, natural philosophy, oral surgery, orthopaedic surgery, Russian, Scottish history—the subject of the new clause—statistics, tropical animal health and a dozen or so other chairs.

We know who the real culprits are. We know who is responsible for those vacancies as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) has just made it clear. The Government have handicapped the university by crucifying university finances during the past 13 years. That drove Sir John Burnett, the chair of the university—an erstwhile Conservative supporter, I am sure—to make an outspoken attack on the Government's mishandling and mismanagement of Edinburgh university. That charge also applies to their treatment of other universities.

Principals, vice-chancellors and staff have been driven to distraction by the Government's philistine attitude towards higher education institutions in our country. The new clause offers us the opportunity to deplore the fact that the Government have forced Edinburgh university —I am sure that the same is true of the other universities for which my hon. Friends have spoken up so eloquently —to freeze appointments to posts. The chair of Scottish history at Edinburgh university is to remain vacant for two years, but some of us are sceptical about whether that post will be filled after that. Appointment to the chair of Russian studies has also been frozen for five years. However, appointment to the chairs of some of the other subjects I have listed have been frozen for five years already and, in some cases, longer. It appears that some people have opened their eyes to that reality only today.

6 pm

I hope that all the opposition parties will endorse the early-day motion that I have tabled today, which condemns the severe financial hardship that the Government have inflicted upon Edinburgh university and other universities. I do not believe that any action could be more damaging to the reputation of Edinburgh university than to put a freeze on appointing the chair of Scottish history. My hon. Friends and I hope to meet Sir David Smith, the principal, to discuss that decision as well as the problem of the other vacant chairs.

It is important that the Secretary of State should accept the invitation that I now extend to him to meet those hon. Members who represent Edinburgh and Lothian. He should also lobby his colleague, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, to ensure that proper funding is given to Edinburgh university. I know that other colleagues will wish us to express similar sentiments on behalf of the institutions in their constituencies.

The buck stops with those who will sit on the Treasury Bench for a few more months, and those months are critical for the campaign to unfreeze the appointment to the chair of Scottish history. Edinburgh's international and domestic reputation has been damaged by the decision to freeze appointment to that post and to so many other chairs. It is time that the Government recognised that damage and accepted the new clause.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): From looking around me, I believe that I have the privilege of being the only graduate researcher who has worked in Edinburgh's leading institution. I refer to Heriot-Watt university, not the other place, which is known to some as Edinburgh university.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) is aware that part of the research study that led to my doctoral thesis related to the establishment of the Aberdeen Steam Trawler Engineers and Firemen's Association—not that anyone, I regret to say, ever reads that thesis.

I have great sympathy for the concern that has been expressed about the chair of Scottish history. I want to make two points about funding for research and, with respect and a total lack of modesty, I believe that they are extremely important. First, whichever party is in government—we are coming towards a change—research funds should not be denied to those who work outwith the orthodoxies of all disciplines in our universities and research institutions. Whether one is talking about history, sociology or even the physical sciences, some scholars are defined by orthodox scientists and professors—often powerful figures in established departments within faculties—as having an unorthodox approach to a particular study of a certain subject. It is often felt that that non-conformist should be denied research funds. It is difficult enough for such non-conformists to gain advancement because the career structure of universities is, to a considerable extent, dictated by the conventional approach. That was spelt out by C. Wright Mills in his seminal work published 40 years ago.

If one chooses to follow the unconventional path—I note that I have the attention of one such scholar on the Government Front Bench, the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell)—and one chooses to go against conventional wisdom, one can be penalised in terms of being denied promotion, or even security of tenure. The funding authorities within universities and at a higher level must respect such unconventional research. I regret to say that my research was utterly conventional; I am not claiming to be a Marxist scholar.

Secondly, I do not have anything against the ancient universities, but funds must be made available to those who work in our newer, younger universities. It does not necessarily follow that the creme de la creme of research talent is to be found in the ancient universities alone. I am not making a special plea as I have no intention of returning to research. My intention is to return to this place with, I hope, an increased majority. It is important that funds are made available to Paisley college—soon to be the university of Paisley—the new university at Glasgow and to Aberdeen university. However, I accept that many years ago Aberdeen had two universities, Aberdeen and King's college.

Mr. Robert Hughes: It is the most ancient university in the country.

Dr. Godman: Yes, I accept that. Those new institutions, including Napier college, are home to first-class researchers. Their accessibility to funds for their research projects should be unconstrained and they should be treated in the same way as those working in our more venerable institutions.

The unorthodox, non-conformist social or physical scientist, historian or linguist should not be denied access to research funds. We must also acknowledge that many first-class researchers work in our newer institutions. They, too, should have ready access to any research funds. We must have no second-class institutions among our universities. Privileges should not be given to ancient universities simply because of their venerability. We must recognise talent, even if it is unorthodox.

I hope that those two points have been noted by those on both Front Benches. Most importantly, I hope that my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench have taken them on board.

Mr. Douglas: Originally I thought that new clauses 1 and 2 were not linked, but, on reflection, I believe that they are. The burden of my remarks will relate to new clause 2.

It is not my intention to make a speech similar to that of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), except to say that I have a great deal of sympathy for what he said. What we are asking for, and what we must try to display in this House, is tolerance. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes, tolerance of different views. I was an academic, and I never expected my students to take me as other than someone who had a Labour bias and held Labour principles. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), who is chattering from a sedentary position, should bide his whish a little.

It is the responsibility of any academic, particularly in the social sciences, to be honest with his or her students, who expect the university or institute of higher education to be a forum for all ideas. No matter how objective a lecturer tries to be, his responsibility is to let the students know that he speaks from a certain bias.

I was brought up in Govan and was taught that the only good Tory was Torygellig, and he played for Rangers. If that was not biased, I do not know what biased is.

Mr. McAllion: We were told exactly the opposite in Springburn.

Mr. Douglas: The hon. Member confirms my point. An academic who deals with susceptible and impressionable individuals, even at the ages of 18, 19 or 20, particularly if he teaches economics, political theory, politics or Scottish history, should let his students recognise his bias. He should make them realise that a university is not simply a forum for lectures but a community of students and academics. Students will probably learn more there than in a formal lecture.

The new clause provides that the funding council should take cognisance of the fact that it will deal with Scottish circumstances. If we are to pursue the truth in relation to Scotland, we must consider the fact that we are not all good. The Douglases were terrible people, with an extremely bad record, and I dare say that that will continue.

We do not seek to say that the Scots are better than anyone else but that we are every bit as good. The whole thesis of the Scottish National party, which seeks independence in Europe, is to cease blaming everybody else. We must stop blaming the English, make our own decisions and take the blame for them. That is what taking personal, independent decisions is about.

I was amazed to read a Labour party press release today saying that the Scottish National party wanted separatism, and that we would be dealing with a market of some 5 million. The thrust of research is that it should be based on a wide market. Why is it fundamental that we devote resources to research in Scottish institutions of higher education? Any academic institution must have research. One of the most impressive books that I have read recently was a biography of Stephen Hawking. If he were to enter the Chamber now, we would wonder who that poor specimen was, but he has one of the great minds of our time.

Mr. Ernie Ross: He is still a member of the Labour party.

Mr. Douglas: I do not deny that he may be a member of the Labour party—good luck to him. I do not care which party he belongs to, because he has a great mind. He has gathered round him students of a high calibre because he is capable of doing certain fundamental research in Oxford. Although he may have been bid away to other institutions in the United States, he stayed in the United Kingdom. It is difficult to attract people of that calibre, because there are few of them.

If an institute of higher education is to succeed, it must be able to devote resources to research. That is the purpose of new clause 2. Educational institutions must be attractive in order that we can compete. We can blame Governments of all political colours—certainly two political colours in the United Kingdom—for starving universities of funds. Not only the Tories have done that. They have altered the proportion of funds in the past couple of years——

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Upwards.

6.15 pm

Mr. Douglas: I concede that. However, in relation to need, we are well behind other nations' industrial market strategies. We have devoted far too much of our fundamental research expenditure to defence purposes and the spin-off, in terms of our industrial market share, has not come about. Scotland is a small nation that must exist on its intellectual capabilities, which is why the new clause has been tabled.

The thesis of the Scottish National party is not to be inward-looking. If we are to consider Scottish history, let us do so objectively. However, unless we provide resources for it, we shall not get objectivity. If we deny resources to an organisation, it cannot work.

The great work of Professor Barrow, who was mentioned earlier, was about Bruce and the community of the realm. Not everyone agrees that Bruce was a great hero. Some people think that he was the Neil Kinnock of his day. He was a politician, and the true patriot was Wallace, which no one likes to hear. In making that assertion, I doubt whether I have carried all hon. Members present with me, but that is a subject for discussion and dispute. Unless we devote resources to research, we shall not achieve the necessary analysis and objectivity.

I therefore hope that new clause 1 will at least have the unanimous support of Opposition Members.

Mr. Wilson I wish to support the new clause without digressing too much. It is a little rich of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) to tell us that the

[Mr. Wilson]

Scottish National party is no longer about anti-Englishness. I can think of no more inherently anti-English slogan than "They've got ours". Those who analyse politics from a class dimension rather than a nationalistic dimension are bound to ask, "Who are 'they'?" Are "they" the working people of Liverpool and Newcastle?

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Unfortunately, they do not get it either.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Lady is right, but I am bound to point out gently that there is no implication of that in the poster.

Are "they" the sons and daughters of Corby steel workers? Are "they" the tens of thousands of people in the English telephone directories whose surnames begin with Mac because they were the victims of highland landlordism? To categorise people as them and us is not a promising platform on which to proceed on the outward-looking basis to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

I support the motion. It should be axiomatic that any educational organisation in Scotland concerned with funding or academic curricula should take account of the Scottish dimension in education. However, I warn the hon. Lady that merely having academic chairs does not guarantee much. The paradox is that I join other hon. Members in deploring the standard of Scottish history teaching, and the place of Scottish culture, in many dimensions of the Scottish education system after a long period in which all those academic chairs have existed. Precious little good they have done us in terms of teaching the history of the ordinary Scottish people or, to quote a particular personal interest, the history of the highlands.

When the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West referred to the greatest work of the retiring holder of the chair of Scottish history at Edinburgh University I thought that he was going to mention his recent column in *The Sun*, which is where Professor Barrow has ended up——

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Like Professor Sillars!

Mr. Wilson: I shall not take up that remark, as this is a conciliatory speech.

I think that the penultimate holder of the chair of Scottish history was Professor Gordon Donaldson, now professor emeritus in Scottish history at Edinburgh university. He was the David Irving of the highland clearances and made a life's work of proving that the clearances did not exist—it would be difficult to identify a more revisionist or more establishment historian and, thus at root, a more anti-Scottish historian. We can have as many chairs as we want, but if the people filling them come from the establishment and have an interest in teaching establishment history, they will find a way of doing so.

The chair of Scottish history at Edinburgh university should be maintained. I agree, as I am sure would the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), that the cuts involving other chairs and courses should not have been made. They were made due to the lack of funding in Scottish higher education, and responsibility rests with the Government. I agree with the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) that there are at least two nations within Scotland. Shetlanders might argue that there are three. Within every country there are various nations, and within Scotland there is a distinctive Gaelic and highland nation with its own history, culture and identity.

If people think that the teaching of Scottish history as a whole is bad, they should consider the teaching of highland history. They could go to any of the districts in the highlands and islands of Scotland—the seat of some of the most radical activity in our country's history during the past 150 years—and find that the great majority of people who had been educated in those counties had heard little of the region's history.

I was educated in the highlands and studied history at a Scottish university. It is my shame and my loss that it was not due to the formal education system that I learned anything of the true history of the highlands and islands —the history of the common people, of landlordism, and the courageous and radical struggle against landlordism.

When we set up chairs and academic councils to form a framework, let us not forget that the content also matters. At least one of the chairs should be in the highlands; not to teach partisan history or argue the political case through history, but to let people know the facts of their own culture and heritage. In that way, people can draw their own conclusions.

I think that it was in his introduction to his "History of the Working Classes of Scotland" that Tom Johnston wrote that anybody who did not know the past could not understand the present or have any chance of moulding the future.

Mr. Worthington: The Opposition are happy to support both new clauses and the sentiments contained in them. Much of today's debate has centred on the position at Edinburgh university and the chair of Scottish history. I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said firmly that the problem did not relate solely to Edinburgh or one chair, but was a problem of resourcing, and had to be tackled. On the other side of Scotland, Glasgow university is heading for a £2·7 million deficit unless it reduces its teaching staff. It is not just Edinburgh university that has a problem; the difficulty exists throughout higher education and is due to under-resourcing.

The Government make much of their current expansion of the higher education system. But any fool Government can let students in; it takes a good Government to ensure that the quality of education is good. It will take years before we see the consequences of expansion without resourcing. One can see some results of under-funding in the condition of facilities, but the mental, academic and scholarly results will take years to emerge.

Unfortunately, there is no survey of the condition of educational buildings in Scotland, but if we consider the condition of buildings as surveyed by the polytechnics and colleges funding council, a graph on the quality of polytechnic buildings contains a category "generally good". Edinburgh university does not even register on the graph, whereas nearly 60 per cent. of the buildings are classified as having major shortcomings.

One can see a major problem in a building, but other grave problems involving staff replacement are becoming apparent. Anyone involved in universities will say that there will be a problem with staff quality in a few years when the present staff retire. At the bottom of the scale of those involved in universities is an underclass of people employed on poverty wages and short-term contracts who are not receiving the quality of research and other experience that they need.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: What additional resources for universities—in specific terms—would the Opposition make available were they to form a Government?

Mr. Worthington: The Minister knows that it is not possible to do that, but we recognise that there is a major under-funding problem. Survey after survey shows that this country is falling behind others on research. We recognise the problem, but the Government do not even seem to do that.

Mr. Forsyth: It is no good the hon. Gentleman telling the House that there is a problem of under-funding and criticising the substantial additional resources that the Government have made available, then declaring that it is impossible for him to say what he would do were he in government. The truth is that the hon. Member for Monklands would not let him add a single cent to the fund and it is sheer humbug for the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) to complain when a Labour Government could do no better than this Government have done and this Government's record is second to none.

Mr. Tom Clarke: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister said that the hon. Member for Monklands would not allow a Labour Government to take that action, but I have never been consulted on the matter.

Mr. Worthington: I shall return to that point later.

Mr. Forsyth: Answer my question.

Mr. Worthington: I shall do so in my own way in my own time.

New clause 1 is about supporting Scottish culture and the Scottish way of life, and we are happy to support those sentiments. Our support for the Bill is centred on the advantages to Scotland of the funding of institutions within Scotland so that different priorities can apply. There would be an enormous advantage in defending Scottish institutions if we were able to link the rest of the education system with the higher education system. That would be the icing on the cake, and is an extremely valuable initiative. It was amusing, during an enjoyable Committee, to see the Minister realising what a good case we had—albeit, somewhat belatedly. There are great advantages in the Bill in terms of defending the Scottish education system, but that aspect must be linked with a Scottish Parliament, which would have prevented the initiatives of recent years.

In Committee we had a valuable discussion on research and our worries on the issue. The Opposition's role is to ask the Government about their attitude and their action in order to find out whether the amount of money devoted to research is adequate. We are committed, as are the Government, to ending the binary divide, but the Government do not seem to realise the consequences for research. As we said in Committee, it is not good enough for them to say that the polytechnics and other central institutions will maintain their traditional mission.

Mr. Forsyth: I am happy to say what we will do for research through the research councils. In 1992 the funding for research will top the £1 billion mark for the first time and over the following three years there will be a 19 per cent. increase. The hon. Gentleman is saying that research funding is not enough. Can he tell us how much more a Labour Government would provide? I was referring to his hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor, who is also a Member for Monklands. If the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie cannot say how much more he would give, he should not waste the time of the House nor con the country by suggesting that he could do anything about it. The truth is that Labour Members are not prepared to put any money behind the promises which they have been making all over the country.

6.30 pm

Mr. Worthington: That is not true. In the 1980s we would never have allowed the share of national wealth devoted to education to fall, while it rose in other countries. That was a statement of the Government's priorities.

At the moment eight universities in Scotland compete for the research pot. In future 12 universities and 13 central institutions within Scotland will be competing for the research pot. So, where eight institutions were competing for the funding in the past, in future there will be be 25. Inevitably that means that there will be cuts.

Even without increasing the money, the Government have to explain how Scotland will be dealt with in the selectivity exercise. The bulk of research money has been allocated to universities on the basis of the number of students. Because Scotland educates more students proportionately than the rest of the United Kingdom, more money was allocated to Scotland. The numbers factor as a way of allocating research funding is being abolished. Therefore, less money will be allocated to Scotland on a per capita basis and a loss will have to be made up.

The Government are adopting a selectivity—by department exercise. The top departments will be graded 5 and the bottom departments 1. That will help the big departments in the big universities. Departments will be graded on a historical basis. If they were successful in the past, they will get a grade 5; if they were not, they will be grade 1.

Academics fear that that will bring in league tables which will make it virtually impossible for an institution to get promotion. Universities with a good record will attract more money and staff will go to them. I hope that the Minister can answer the fear of academics. Recently research money has been gravitating towards the south-east where there is a concentration of large universities and departments.

As to universities which appear in the top 10 of any research council category, such as the Universities Funding Council, the Science and Engineering Research Council, the Natural Environment Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Agricultural and Food Research, Scotland in total, mainly through Edinburgh and Glasgow taking six of the places, has seven top 10 places. London, with all its colleges, on its own has 11 top 10 places. If there is to be purely a selectivity exercise, academics in Scotland are worried that there will be less money because 25 institutions will have to

[Mr. Worthington]

go into the same pot as eight in the past, and that it will be difficult for them to get their fair share of research council funding.

In Committee we had an extensive debate on the lack of a planning role for the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. Many small institutions will be encouraged to compete against each other. The Minister must deal with the fear that in that fight they will lose sight of the larger prize and that excessive competition will lead to the weakening of the institutions. That is not an argument for all the institutions to come together in a university of Scotland. The ruling out by the Government of a planning function for the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council will prevent the co-operation which many of those institutions want. There is a lack of concern by the Government about that.

Were I in the Minister's shoes, the first thing that I would do on research would be to commission research into the adequacy of the funding. All the evidence that I have been able to find shows great concern about the Government's sponsorship of research and its allocation within Scotland. For example, the Government's sponsorship of research through departments has been falling for years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I shall have one more go. The hon. Gentleman talked about what he would do if he were in my shoes. If he were the Minister with responsibility for those matters—at present a Minister in the Department of Education and Science—how much extra would he make available for research on top of the record £1 billion which the Government have made available?

Mr. Worthington: The first thing that any Education Minister should do is commission research and ask his Department about the adequacy of the research base. The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology said:

> "We recommend that the Government use this period of grace"—

when there was an extra £10 million—

> "to take an overview of spending under the science budget as a whole and to consider whether, in view of the alarming response of research councils to the present settlement, they are content to live with the consequences of their public expenditure policy for science."

The Select Committee said that the Government's funding of science was disastrous.

Similarly, when looking at a Community framework for research and development, the Select Committee said the same about Britain's performance when it said that we were falling behind every other country in Europe in civil research and development. The Government have been dependent upon industry to fill the hole caused by their own lack of funding for research. Because of the recession it is unlikely that industry can step in. We are worried that the Government have not done a serious appraisal of the need for basic, fundamental research. They have not considered that issue. The Government's record of funding research over the years has been deplorable. They must now ask themselves whether the system that they are setting up so casually will lead to a strengthening of the research base in Scottish universities or whether, as many fear, it will weaken that base. I do not get the impression that the Government, with all their resources, have done any work on this which will reassure the people who work in the colleges and universities of Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This has been an interesting debate. Usually I do not intervene too frequently in speeches by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), but this time I intervened on three occasions. The hon. Gentleman was arguing that funding for research purposes was inadequate. He refused to acknowledge the large increase—to more than £1 billion —that the Government have provided or the 19 per cent. increase that we propose over the next three years, and he refused to say by how much a Labour Government would increase that funding.

When I pressed the hon. Gentleman, he said that the first thing he would do if he became a Minister would be to commission research to find out what was happening, yet he seems to have done enough research already to be able to claim that present funding is inadequate. Why then will he not give a commitment? The answer is that his speech was sheer cant and humbug.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) came to our deliberations, treated us to a speech and left. He advanced the view that Edinburgh university's problems were entirely of the Government's making. He made no reference to the management difficulties that Edinburgh university is experiencing or to the fact that the university is unique in Scotland in having a deficit problem. That problem is due to the mismanagement of resources, because of which hard decisions have had to be taken.

Although I cannot commend the new clause to the House, I can appreciate why the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) sought to raise the matter. I can appreciate the worries about Edinburgh university perhaps not being able immediately to fill the chair of Scottish history when the present incumbent retires this autumn.

I have seen a letter from the principal of Edinburgh university which appeared in *The Scotsman* dated 31 January. In it, the principal made it clear that no decision had been taken that the chair should remain vacant for two years—certainly not by administrators. I think that the hon. Lady may have seen the letter for herself.

Mr. Worthington: If Edinburgh university is unique, why is Glasgow university heading for a £2·7 million deficit which will mean non-replacement of staff?

Mr. Forsyth: That is an assertion. I said that Edinburgh university was unique among the institutions in having a deficit. Now the hon. Gentleman suggests that Glasgow may, if it does not take certain steps, find itself in a particular position. I have no information about that. My point was that many universities under central institutions in Scotland are not in that position. It is absurd of the hon. Gentleman to argue that Edinburgh's problems are a consequence of Government action, given that Government funds, through the funding council and directly to other institutions, have meant that they have none of these problems. Indeed, there are record numbers of students in higher and further education in Scotland, thanks to the additional funding provided by the Government.

Mr. Douglas: The Minister need go no further than along the road to Stirling university, on whose court I served. Without going into too much detail, I can tell him that the university is working under considerable financial limitations. It is not quite truthful, therefore, to tell the House that Edinburgh is unique. Other universities work under similar restraints, although they may not be of the same magnitude.

6.45 pm

Mr. Forsyth: I can only communicate the information given to me: these institutions are not running into deficit. Stirling received the largest increase in support of any institution and it is going from strength to strength—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members must draw their own conclusions as to the reasons for that, but it is due in no small part to the enterprise and success generated in and by the institution.

The hon. Member for Moray spoke about the importance of a knowledge of Scottish history, even though much of her speech was devoted to what happens in schools. I absolutely agree with her, and I hope that she will support the foreword that I have written to a report on environmental studies stressing the importance of subject teaching and of giving children a grounding in history, geography and science—and, of course, Scottish history. Subject-based teaching has a significant part to play in the later stages of primary school.

The hon. Lady treated us to quite a selection of poetry. She, like me, benefited from studying in the days before the trendies decided that didactic teaching was bad news and that rote learning was to be discouraged. The hon. Lady treated us to a poem by MacDiarmid. Perhaps she remembers the lines:

"Mars is braw in crammasy,
Venus in her green silk gown,
The auld mune shaks her gowden feathers;
Their starry talk's a wheen o'blethers".

I have never heard such "a wheen o' blethers" as we heard today from the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. He spent his time in Committee arguing that we should take action to limit the Bill's powers in respect of academic freedom and the consequences that arise from that for conditions of grants and powers of direction. Today, he argues that it would be right—I have no doubt that he will vote for the new clause—for the Government to intervene by statute in the affairs of a particular university——

Mr. Worthington: I suggested no such thing. The Minister must withdraw that statement.

Mr. Forsyth: I am happy to withdraw it. I take the hon. Gentleman's remarks to mean that he will not vote for the new clause.

Mr. Worthington: Wrong.

Mr. Forsyth: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will make his position clear.

Mr. Worthington: We have argued extensively that the Government should not interfere in the academic affairs of institutions. We stand by that; we will not alter that line at all. We also support the sentiment behind the new clause —that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council should ensure stimulation of Scottish culture, not interference in individual institutions.

Mr. Forsyth: That is most extraordinary. We have heard of no other example of an institution in Scotland at which there is a problem to do with the teaching of Scottish history. The whole debate has centred on Edinburgh university. The justification for the new clause lies in what is happening there. The hon. Gentleman has devoted a great deal of energy to arguing for an arm's length policy—a policy which leaves these matters to the funding council and which does not give powers of discretion that are institution-specific. At the same time, the hon. Gentleman is going to support a new clause whose mover has made it clear that it is motivated by what is happening at a particular university. That seems contradictory.

The allocation of resources to universities is a matter for the funding council. The Government are quite properly not involved in such decisions and it is nonsense to suggest that Edinburgh university has been singled out for harsh treatment, or that its recent financial problems derive from Government policy. It is widely understood that Edinburgh's deficit arises from internal financial management problems which are now being tackled. A recovery plan is in place.

As for new clause 2, one of the most important functions of the funding council will be to encourage higher quality research. I do not believe that new clause 2 would add to its ability to do so.

Apart from the additional resources which we have made available, the research councils will continue to operate on a United Kingdom basis. At present, the other main source of public funds for research, besides the research councils, is the Universities Funding Council. Its role will now pass to the new funding council, which is recognised in clause 34 which gives it powers to fund institutions both for the provision of education and for the undertaking of research. It is neither necessary nor appropriate that research should be singled out as new clause 2 suggests.

The new funding council will have considerable resources to go to basic and strategic research. We have already made it clear that we do not expect institutions to change their existing missions. We expect those that have concentrated on teaching and on industry-sponsored applied research and development to continue to do so, although it will be open to them to compete for the new council's research funds in areas in which they have particular strengths.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): In Committee, I raised with the Minister the point about the two-tier structure which will inevitably develop after the new universities are created within the next two years. He told me that there would be a concentration on teaching or on research among the different institutions. That is the fear of the universities that have written to me and to other hon. Members in Committee.

The Minister failed to give me an assurance, although he talked about £274 million new money for research over the next three years. That is welcome, but the point is how the new universities will manage to grab a slice of that cake. The central institutions had no research income other than that which they were able to gain on their own. How will they be able to compete with the existing universities? Either they will not be able to compete or, if they can, a proportion of the money available will be taken away from the existing universities. Universities such as

[Mr. Mike Watson]

Stirling, Dundee and Aberdeen will face retrenchment and will become mere teaching institutions. How does the Minister foresee that problem being avoided?

Mr. Forsyth: I have already explained that we have published the additional provision for research which was set out in the Government's public expenditure plans. If the hon. Gentleman is advancing a case that those funds are inadequate, he must ask his hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) why he refuses to give a commitment to spend a cent more.

Mr. Watson: What proportion of money?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman is talking not about the absolute amount, but about distribution, I can tell him that funds will be allocated to the institutions that can devote them to the best effect. Institutions will compete for the funds. The hon. Gentleman is correct to point to the role of the central institutions in getting applied research and sponsorship from industry. Their basic mission statements will not change, but they will be able to compete for research funds according to the quality of research. The hon. Gentleman is right to argue that some of that research is of such quality that the institutions will benefit.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) made the most extraordinary speech. I have no brief to support the Scottish National party and I share the hon. Gentleman's revulsion about the way in which that party seeks to blame England and the Westminster Parliament for every deficiency, sometimes invented and sometimes real, in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman sought to lecture the House after 12 years of the Scottish Labour party telling people in Scotland that they were hard done by, that they got a rotten deal from Westminster and that public expenditure was not one quarter more north of the border than it was south of the border.

I am glad that the tune has changed. The *Daily Record* now extols the virtues of the Westminster system for Scotland. That is a change of tune by the Scottish Labour party. The hon. Gentleman must bear some of the responsibility for the resentment and for the rise of nationalism about which he now has the temerity to complain in the House.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The Minister cannot point to a single word in any of my speeches in which I have claimed that the responsibility for the difficulties in Scotland was due to the Westminster Parliament or to the English. I have always put the blame on the Tories, which is where it lies.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman has spent the past six months arguing that the health service in Scotland is underfunded when it is in fact funded to the extent of 25 per cent. more than in England and well beyond what the hon. Gentleman proposes on his own party's behalf. He knows full well that he and his colleagues have sought to fight the Government by fighting the Westminster system, and that they have played straight into the hands of the Scottish National party. I urge the House to reject the new clauses.

Mr. Dalyell: In Committee, I had a great deal to say about research, but because the House wants to get on and because I have given undertakings to the Whips, I will scrap my copious notes on research. However, I want to say something about the chair at Edinburgh university and about new clause 1.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and I are fretting a bit about what the Minister said about the mismanagement—the word he used—at Edinburgh university. It is not quite as simple as that. I asked the Minister to put the matter in terms of partial mismanagement at certain stages of the past 30 years. Those of us, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central and I, who are immersed in the matter know that the problems go back to Sir Edward Appleton's time as vice-chancellor and are not of recent making.

Dr. Godman: Good point.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend says, "Good point." That is the truth of the matter

Another part of the truth is that, when the Minister asks about other universities in Scotland, he should realise that Glasgow suffers from almost the same problems and is getting into difficulties. The other universities may have special circumstances. The special circumstances of Edinburgh, as I think the Whip, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), will admit, are shared by the great universities of Manchester and Leeds. Many of the universities whose buildings were constructed in the previous century and scattered throughout our great cities have maintenance problems. Sir David Smith and his senior colleagues the year before last went over the maintenance problems of running Edinburgh university. They are horrendous.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: If it helps the hon. Gentleman, I am happy to acknowledge that I did not intend to imply that the difficulties experienced in the management at Edinburgh university were to be attributed to the present management team. Those difficulties are now being addressed. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there are great management difficulties. I was trying to make the point that it is wrong to suggest that the problem arises because of Government action in respect of the funding regime, which was the point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), who is still absent from the Chamber.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not want to pursue the matter,

I want to return to the subject of the chair of history. When we were first approached by the students, Sharon Adams and Kirsty Lingstadt who is one of the many Norwegians at the university, I was greatly impressed by the fact that the students were prepared to go to such lengths to defend their own department. The natural reaction of a politician is that, when students and young people care so much about their department, they deserve a proper hearing.

I told the students that their next port of call was the dean of the faculty of arts. Naturally, I rang up Eric Fernie, the chairman of the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland—like others, I have greatly benefited from the visits around Scotland of the Ancient Monuments Board—and asked for his opinion. His reply is of importance to the House. He said first that it was a matter of undershooting targets. He said that there was not enough money in the faculty of arts to do what it wanted to do. It is wrong for the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) to think that such people are insensitive to the situation. They are highly sensitive.

What calculation has been made of the employer's costs? It is an expensive post. The agreed words between Professor Fernie and anybody who cared to listen were:

> "If Parliament directs the university of Edinburgh to fill the chair of Scottish studies, then it should permit the university to undershoot staff savings targets by the equivalent of one post."

Are the Government prepared to make any special dispensation? I suspect that they are not, and that therefore it would be right to press the new clause to a vote, for the reasons given by hon. Members from all parties.

7 pm

The vital question is, what is the understanding of the Scottish Office about the endowment element in that chair? Again, it is important to put on record the fact that the present incumbent, Professor Barrow—not wishing to make controversial statements—simply said that, if the chair was suspended, there would be harmful discontinuity to studies. Whatever my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South rightly says about other chairs, I agree with the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute and other hon. Members that Scottish history is a uniquely important chair to the university of Edinburgh. Others can have chairs in molecular parasitology and astronomy, but the chair of Scottish history in the Scottish capital is surely of considerable importance.

I defend the vice-chancellor and others, who have come under some criticism. We have kept the Polygon—the only university press in Scotland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South knows, it has done many good things.

The Minister quoted the vice-chancellor's letter in *The Scotsman.* I shall quote another part of that same letter. Sir David Smith said:

> "Ring-fencing Scotland's higher education would not enhance that reputation or the health of our higher education institutions. It would, in fact, imply the loss of minority interest subjects, which might no longer be viable within an exclusively Scottish framework.
>
> It would imperil the proportionately higher share of the UK's public higher education resources that has, so far, come to Scotland. It could well threaten Scotland's standing in research and it would also remove the resulting direct financial return to the Scottish economy, which has been valued conservatively at a figure of at least some £40 million annually.
>
> Scotland's interests' are not always as simple as some would have us believe."

That is an important part of that letter.

Of course, it is not only the chair of Scottish history that matters; it is the vexed question of the Audubon books. Some of us think that, because of Audubon's special relationship with Edinburgh, that issue should be given some priority. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South rightly said, the matter must be put in context. It must be of some concern that the chair of astronomy is not filled—a chair most recently held by Malcolm Longair. It is a distinguished chair. Other chairs are not filled, such as African literature. We must remember what Edinburgh has done for Malawi and other parts of east and central Africa. It is a tragedy. Natural philosophy—the chair of Clerk Maxwell and Norman Feather—is unoccupied, and that is also a tragedy. The chairs of Russian and of tropical animal health speak for themselves.

Although the matter must be seen in context, there is a special case for a chair of Scottish history. I ask the Minister to be clear when answering my question—does he view Scottish history as different from any other chair in the university of Edinburgh?

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: In view of some of the comments made about the new clause, it is appropriate for me to reply briefly to the debate. When we tabled the amendments, we thought that they were gentle amendments with which people could not possibly disagree. Some of the speeches, especially from Labour Members, were incredible. I appear to have stirred up a hornets' nest, which was certainly not my intention. Anyone who read the two new clauses carefully would have clearly realised that we were only asking that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council should pay particular attention in its funding and its assessment of quality to the study of history, languages and the culture of Scotland, and ensure that appropriate funds and attention are devoted to certain areas of research. I should have thought that few people could disagree with such amendments.

Mr. Robert Hughes: We are voting for them.

Mrs. Ewing: That is difficult to believe in view of some of the speeches.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) appears to be out of touch with what the teaching of history actually involves. I assure him that learning history parrot fashion, date after date, has long since disappeared. Anyone who has been involved in the teaching of history, as I have, can assure him that the importance of the teaching of that subject lies in the development of analytical skills in youngsters, so that they can look at issues and problems and reach an objective conclusion.

The teaching of history, as of any other subject, should be accompanied by straightforward objectivity. It might interest the hon. Gentleman to know that, as somebody who taught history with great objectivity, from time to time I was supervised by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), and he equally observed objectivity in the teaching of mathematics.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North appeared to think that the study of Scottish history would involve people in trying to imbue in Scottish youngsters a particular philosophy or approach to the political scene. Nothing could be further from the truth. The hon. Gentleman does himself, his colleagues and the people of Scotland a great disservice by the remarks that he made tonight.

I say both to the hon. Gentleman and to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South—[HON. MEMBERS: "North."] I am sorry, I mean the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson). There seems to have been great difficulty with direction during the debate. Both hon. Members seem to be saying that an emphasis on Scottish history, culture or languages would imbue a sense of superiority and suggest that Scots were all good. I have never adhered to the philosophy

"Here's tae us, Wha's like us?
Damn few—they're a'deid."

I recognise that there are people in Scotland who have exploited others—just as anywhere in the world there has

[Mrs. Ewing]

been exploitation. We are a party that strives hard to show that its argument is with the establishment, not with the people of England, so I regret those speeches.

The hon. Members for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) and for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) were mean-minded when they referred to the fact that the amendments specifically mentioned the chair of Scottish history at Edinburgh university. It was used as an example because it is a topical matter. People are talking about it at home and they want to know what will happen and what elected Members think.

I have represented education interests for many years—not just in this Parliament, but in previous Parliaments. I suggest that those hon. Members read some of my speeches, when I spoke clearly about the difficulties that all universities face—not just those in Scotland but throughout the United Kingdom—in developing chairs in various subjects and in research. I do not think that they do their case very much good by adopting such a petty attitude.

The Minister referred to a letter from Sir David Smith. It is true that no final decision about the chair of Scottish history has been reached, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), who spoke of the fear that, if the chair were not filled immediately, there would be a continuous knock-on effect and it would remain vacant indefinitely. The debate has brought to light the strength of feeling on the subject, and I hope that that will influence the university authorities when they have to make a final decision. Ultimately, however, the Government have a responsibility to make their view known to the university.

I am sorry that the Minister felt that he could not support this very gentle measure, which does no more than emphasise the importance that Scots the length and breadth of our country—and firth of Scotland—attach to our culture, history and languages. As we have already engaged in a poetic exchange, and as the Burns season in Scotland is currently ending, may I quote the following:

> "Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
> To think how mony counsels sweet,
> How mony wise and sage advices"

the Government from this Bench despises.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 174, Noes 261.

Division No. 70 **[7.10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Bellotti, David
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dick Douglas and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry

Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 3

REPORTS ON THE WELFARE OF STUDENTS

'—(1) The Secretary of State, following consultations with the boards of management of further education colleges, shall publish an annual report on the welfare of students in further education.

(2) The Secretary of State shall require the Higher Education Funding Council to publish an annual report on the welfare of students in higher education.

(3) The Secretary of State shall lay before each House of Parliament both reports published as a result of this Section, together with a statement of any conclusions he may have drawn as a result of the reports.'.—*[Mr. Stephen.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Stephen: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendment No. 61 and amendment No. 64, in clause 1, page 2, line 4, at end add—

'(6) the Secretary of State shall lay annually before Parliament a report giving such information as may be prescribed as to how he has implemented his duty under subsection (1) above, and in particular what provision has been made for persons over school age who have learning difficulties.'.

Mr. Stephen: If the Minister were in his place, I would make no apology to him for returning to the issue of

[Mr. Stephen]

student welfare, not least because in Committee he showed that he did not understand the poverty and the pressures that face most students in Scotland.

The new clause requires the Secretary of State for Scotland to ensure the provision of an annual report on the welfare of students in further education. We should be very happy if that report were to be submitted by the further education funding council, but as the Minister appears to be reluctant to set up that body the report would have to come from the Secretary of State. The new clause also requires the Higher Education Funding Council to publish an annual report on the welfare of students in higher education.

One can have the very best of universities, with excellent teaching, excellent courses and excellent facilities, but they will be next to useless if the students are hungry, homeless, cold and debt ridden. That assumes that students are there in the first place. I return to the point that many students are deterred from going to university if they know that they will be under severe financial pressure and that their parents will put pressure on them not to go to university or into further education but to try to take up work—in many cases at much too early a stage.

During the last decade or so, the financing of students has undergone enormous changes. The loans system, which is opposed by an overwhelming number of students in Scotland, has been introduced. Student entitlement to benefit has been removed. Moreover, student grants have been frozen. At a time of general economic recession, another factor causes immense hardship: the shortage of employment for students during vacation periods. Employment has in the past provided an important source of income for them. Many parents now talk about saving to send their children to university, but some parents cannot do that. The gate cannot, therefore, be opened to children from those families. That bias against poorer families is a great source of worry.

In real terms, student grants have declined dramatically over the last decade. The mandatory grant would have to be increased by over 24 per cent. if it were to be brought back to its 1978-79 level and by 31·6 per cent. if it were to ✓ reflect the equivalent increases in the cost of living over the same period. Many students were caused immense additional hardship by the introduction of the poll tax and the still existing requirement—whose abolition should be announced as soon as possible, but no later than the next Budget—to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax.

A recent National Union of Students survey shows how many students find themselves in debt. In the case of those sampled, more than 50 per cent. had significant debt problems. That was even before the introduction of student loans. The problem may be that the Government take the same view of student unions and their surveys as they take of other trade unions. Although they appear to be disinterested, dismissive and hostile towards the NUS and other unions, I ask them to care about the plight of students. It is a very real problem.

We believe that the colleges and funding councils should provide independent, authoritative reports on the welfare of our students so that Ministers will be forced to listen. The areas of concern, where effective independent monitoring is required, include housing costs, the availability of accommodation—a real problem—and general financial support.

Students are faced with particularly high prices in places such as Aberdeen and Edinburgh. In recent months and years, prices in Aberdeen have markedly increased. The costs of student accommodation there are quite prohibitive. Demand is high but accommodation is not available. Students are competing on the market with not only other students but oil workers in a very buoyant Aberdeen economy.

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A similar situation now exists in Edinburgh where house prices are generally high compared with those in other parts of Scotland. For example, at Aberdeen university only first year students from outside the area are guaranteed accommodation. The situation is even worse at the Robert Gordon Institute of Technology which at present can provide only 16 per cent. of its students with accommodation.

In Scotland as a whole, only 44 per cent. of university students are provided with accommodation. Students in my constituency have been forced to be accommodated in local hotels. Others in the Aberdeen area have been living in tented accommodation. In some areas they have had to live in senior common rooms and university halls, provided with only a bed, a locker and a screen.

Inevitably the council tax will also hit some students severely. Certainly it is a property tax, but it still has some elements of the poll tax, a hangover from the poll tax system. I am convinced that in certain circumstances the cost of the new council tax will be passed on to students. Even if the Minister does not realise this from our deliberations in Committee, it still seems likely that many landlords and landladies will pass on to students in student accommodation the personal element of the new council tax.

In addition to covering housing needs, I hope that the annual reports will pay particular attention to the students most in need. Many mature students face extra financial burdens. Some students have parents on low incomes, some students are ill, have disabilities or have responsibilities for caring.

Despite what the Minister said, there remains concern about the level of and uncertainty over the future management of the access funds which the current Universities Funding Council distributes to each institution. While the future of access funds remains undecided and while the lessons from the high cost of distributing them remain unlearnt, the Minister cannot state that there are no problems of hardship merely because of the existence of the funds. Great hardship exists.

New clause 3 would allow the Government to assess the welfare of students on an annual basis. If the Minister were to argue that student welfare is adequate at present—I find it very difficult to believe that he could argue that on an objective assessment—the report from the Higher Education Funding Council could substantiate his argument. We are seeking independent objective advice that would, I believe, be of considerable assistance to the Minister and to the Scottish Office in the fulfilment of their responsibilities to our students. That is the purpose of the new clause.

The Secretary of State has often talked about funding. Liberal Democrats are committed to funding the whole education system and, in particular, our higher and further education systems. We would be prepared, if necessary, to put 1p on income tax to make the changes. We would guarantee all students access to a minimum income and give them access to the benefits that they now so sorely miss. The Liberal Democrats have a deep commitment to that issue which is sadly lacking from the Government.

The Minister argued in Committee about the increases in access which he has provided—I almost said "increases in expenditure". In many areas he expected increased access to occur without increased funding. However, I appreciate that he is striving to increase access to higher and further education among young people in Scotland. There is a long way to go and it should not be paid for at the cost of hacking at the grants made available to students, which seemed to be the logic of his argument in Committee.

We need a well-funded higher education system and a well-funded further education system, but we also need adequate provision through grants and a minimum income to all our young people.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I had expected the Minister to move amendment No. 61. I wonder whether he wants to intervene to say whether that is his intention.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not necessary to move any amendments. They are debated, the new clause having been moved.

Mr. Clarke: I am very grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am aware of that. May I explain that my colleagues and I tabled the new clause because of the Minister's undertakings in Committee. We want to be especially sure that the Government have not changed their policy in the past two or three minutes, perhaps because of the debate that we have just had. On the assumption that the Government are——

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Perhaps it would be more convenient if I explained. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have not changed my mind in the past few minutes. Undertakings given in Committee will be fulfilled.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the Minister and to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your patience but I am sure that you will understand that we couthie Scots want to be absolutely sure before we accept offers which are not concrete. However, the Minister has now assured the House that he will support amendment No. 61.

We welcome that because it is consistent and compatible with amendment No. 64 which arose from our discussions in Committee. We thought that there should be a recognition of the needs, difficulties and rights of people with disabilities and special needs and, most importantly, that reports should be made to the House.

Some hon. Members might think that I have been too kind to the Minister this afternoon perhaps because I am in the unusual position of having won not one but two concessions. Perhaps I should restore normality to our relationship across the Floor. First, the Minister should note the fact that our new clause deals with this House, the Westminster Parliament. Secondly, I think that he got it wrong earlier. He was perhaps a little carried away with the atmosphere. If he reads his words, he will find that he was wrong in the debate about Scottish history and the *Daily Record.* The *Daily Record* has supported the Westminster Parliament but has exercised its devolved journalistic powers to support a Scottish Parliament in Scotland, so there has been no change in the position that it has held for some time. It has remained perfectly consistent.

Although I welcome the reports suggested in the new clause—and those suggested in new clause 3 which the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen) commended to the House—I must say in the spirit of our discussions this afternoon that we have made it absolutely plain that we are discussing the Bill presented by the Government. We have made it clear that we are not in favour of taking colleges of education away from local Government. Despite all the debates, the hours we spent in Committee—I was very pleased to serve on the Committee —and the debates on the Floor of the House, we have made it clear that the salient fact about Government policy on these matters is that announced by the Secretary of State for the Environment. He made it clear from the Dispatch Box that the Government are trying to rescue themselves from the mess they were in because of the poll tax by taking colleges of education away from local government. That is also to apply to Scotland and, by that method, the Government are hoping that their cosmetic approach will succeed.

In view of the fact that the changes have very little educational content, I believe that very few people will support the proposal from an education point of view. The Minister must know that there is precious little support for his proposals. Precisely because the Government seem to be steamrollering the Bill through in the hope of getting Royal Assent before the election, and thus of taking the colleges of education away from local government, it is all the more important that reports should be made to the House, as the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside said, and as our amendment No. 64 seeks to ensure.

That is our view for the time being. It will come as no surprise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, or to the rest of the House, that we believe that in the not-too-distant future such important aspects of Scottish education as Scottish students, Scottish students with disabilities, and Scottish students with learning difficulties will be matters for a Scottish Parliament. Then we shall not have the sort of rushed debate that we are having today on such important issues.

As we are having the debate, and as the Minister—on these issues, at any rate—appears benevolent, I hope that he can give the House an assurance, as he did when we were discussing what would happen when the Government issued circulars about the implementation of their proposals. The people who will be appointed to the boards will be largely business people, with no specific relevant experience—few of them ever come into contact with students, or with people with learning difficulties. Will the Minister assure the House that when he deals with the boards he will consult Scottish care in the community groups before issuing circulars or deciding on full implementation of the provision?

You will be quick to correct me, I know, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I stray too far from the subject, but the Minister is aware—he wrote to me on the subject—that our procedures do not allow us to stray too far towards the subject of community care. However, as Sir Roy Griffiths

[Mr. Clarke]

observed in his report, there cannot be complete community care unless education is included as an important aspect of it.

How can it be otherwise, when so many of our young people are blind or deaf—some are blind and deaf—or otherwise physically disabled? The Spastics Society is very interested in this issue. Such young people, and their families and carers, want real fulfilment to be possible. We want to see those people reach their full potential, and education is very much part of that achievement. That is why there are so many 19-plus groups all over the country.

Further education is relevant here. Many such people have passed the age of 19, and at that stage, unless proper assessments are made, unless Parliament is fully aware of what is taking place, as amendment No. 64 advocates, there can be enormous difficulties.

We all know families in which young people have been attending ordinary schools—some might say, special schools—and then suddenly, when they are 19, their whole world changes. That may happen because proper assessments have not been made, or because services are not available. Adult training centres do not exist in every part of the country. Such families find that their whole world has changed, and that young people who have gone each day to special schools, or whatever, suddenly find that nothing is happening. Parents and carers have an immense problem—we must approach the subject with great humility. They must ensure that their youngsters are occupied 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That cannot be done unless we accept that colleges of education can offer hope, potential and fulfilment to such young people.

That will mean courses—perhaps courses in the use of computers. In many cases, as my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) will confirm, it already does mean that. It could—and does—mean courses in horticulture, hairdressing, and in developing sign language, and so on. Furthermore, able-bodied students could enrich their own lives by becoming involved in such courses, and thus offering recognition to people with learning difficulties—offering an acceptance that they, too, are part of our modern society.

For those reasons, I commend amendment No. 64 to the Minister. As I have said, it is consistent with Government amendment No. 61, and with the arguments advanced in Committee. In fairness, I must add that it is also consistent with what the Minister has said. He has considered the matter and brought provisions before the House. I hope that there will be agreement, and that the annual reports will not be seen as a token acceptance. We want an Act which—in the interests not only of education but of every person, every fellow citizen, who has the right to participate in education—actively considers the serious problems involved.

7.45 pm

Mr. Dalyell: I am glad that Mr. Speaker selected the amendments and judged that they were fit for inclusion in the debate. As is my wont on this Report stage, I shall content myself with a question to the Minister. Do he and his advisers know what the drop-out rates are for Scottish universities? I was taken aback by a recent paper requested by Dr. David Ingram and myself—we are two lay members of the biological sciences advisory committee of Edinburgh university.

The paper was produced by Professor Dale and his colleagues. I shall not regurgitate the figures. They are very sensitive, and I do not want to shout them abroad. Anyhow, they are not my figures. I should simply like to establish clearly that the Scottish Office knows what the drop-out rate is. That rate has a great deal to do with the financial situation of students.

Like many other hon. Members, I have close connections with students, and all the information that I receive suggests that there is real and mounting poverty among them. Poverty often forces students to withdraw from courses. If Professor Dale's paper and the other evidence is correct, and can be generalised, the situation is serious not only in terms of hardship, human distress and tragedy, but in terms of value for money. It does not make sense to have young people embarking on courses and then dropping out because of the lack of relatively small sums to tide them through. Does the Scottish Office know what the position is ?

Mr. Worthington: No.

Mr. Dalyell: I rather hope that it does, and I suspect that it does, but I should like confirmation of the fact, and to hear any comment that the Minister is prepared to make on the subject.

Dr. Godman: I was not on the Committee. For my sins or otherwise, I was not chosen to serve on it, but I should like to say something about amendment No. 64. It would strengthen clause 1, which admirably aims, among other things, to make better further education provision for people with disabilities of various kinds. As the employment service is seeking to provide more job opportunities for people with disabilities—that is precisely what is happening right now—it is essential that we improve the education and training of our fellow citizens so that they are better able to present themselves for the few job opportunities open to them.

On Friday, I shall be speaking at a function organised by the local jobcentre, with a view to publicising locally the new service that the Department of Employment has put together to meet the need to impress upon employers their moral responsibility to employ people with disabilities. I was very happy to accept the invitation because, in my constituency, a quite remarkable relationship has developed between the local further education college—the James Watt college—and the Fitzgerald adult training centre, a centre designed primarily to train people with a handicap—in this case, people who are mentally handicapped in some way.

We have a responsibility, through our further education colleges, to provide education and training courses for people who are physically handicapped and for those citizens who are mentally handicapped. Many jobs in all kinds of industries can be adequately filled by people with disabilities, provided that the trainees are given the right kind of education and training both within that occupation and before they take it up. The Minister has a fundamental responsibility to ensure that colleges of further education provide those training and education opportunities for youngsters with disabilities. I shall never forget meeting a young constituent last year. That young man was confined to a wheelchair. He was given a job—albeit a temporary job—and had to start work at eight o'clock in the morning. His parents told me that, although his place of work was only five minutes away, the lad was ready to leave before six o'clock, so excited was he to be given any kind of job opportunity. There are many thousands more like that young man—who, unfortunately, is unemployed again—who could benefit from education and training courses provided by local colleges.

My constituency is very fortunate because of the relationship between the James Watt college and the Fitzgerald centre, and the devolved training centre in Port Glasgow, but much more needs to be done, and the new clause would enable us to determine, for a start, the extent of the education and training problem that we have. It would also help us to determine more precisely and analytically the education and training needs of people with disabilities. I welcome the new clause and hope that it is accepted.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Let me start by saying something about new clause 3. I remind the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen) that I made it clear, in response to the amendments that he tabled in Committee, that a clear distinction had to be made between student support and institutional funding. Support for higher education institutions is, and will remain, the responsibility of the appropriate Secretary of State. The funding of higher education will be the responsibility of the Higher Education Funding Council.

Those two activities are quite separate and should not be confused. In addition, student welfare is primarily a matter for the institutions themselves. It embraces a variety of functions, including counselling and the disbursing of access funds. The current activities of the Universities Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council in distributing the funds to institutions is purely a matter of administrative convenience and does not imply any substantive responsibility for welfare matters. It is therefore illogical to propose that the funding council should produce a report on a matter for which it has no responsibility.

Support for non-advanced further education students is provided by bursaries from education authorities. I am still reviewing the future of the arrangements. In addition boards of management of FE colleges have powers in clause 8 to provide students of their college with such assistance of a financial or other nature as they consider appropriate.

The arrangements that are available for student support for further and higher education students are fair. They reflect a balance between support from the taxpayer and the contribution that an individual and his or her family makes. Student demand for places is buoyant. This does not suggest that the arrangements are unsatisfactory.

As either producing a report on the welfare of further education students or requiring the funding council to publish one on the welfare of higher education students makes no sense, it follows that laying the reports before Parliament would make no sense either.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was kind enough to suggest that the Scottish Office might have some information which his hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) thought it almost certainly would not have. As with most things, the truth lies somewhere in between. We have known for some time—and the hon. Member for Linlithgow is right to draw attention to it—that, on the face of it, non-completion rates at Scottish universities are comparatively high. For that reason, the Government have commissioned substantial research into the matter, which will take the form of statistical analysis of the available data to draw general conclusions about the extent, nature and possible causes of the problem, together with an in-depth examination of individual case histories to identify the facts at play and current examples of good and bad practice. Until the results of those research exercises have been assessed, it would be premature to assign any particular cause, such as financial difficulties, to non-completion rates.

Mr. Dalyell: When will the research be completed? Do we know?

Mr. Forsyth: If I may, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman. I can give him an answer as quickly as conclusions can be drawn from the work that is being done. I shall certainly look into the matter, and I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about it. Some of the proposals for changes in the secondary schools reflect anxiety about this very matter.

Amendment No. 61 meets an undertaking given to the Committee to emphasise the accountability of the Secretary of State to Parliament for the exercise of his duties for further education in part I of the Bill. I am confident that the annual report will show that the colleges of further education will flourish as never before with their new freedoms. It will also provide a means to allow the Secretary of State to show how he is meeting his important duty to have regard to requirements of persons over school age with learning difficulties. As on so many occasions, I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Monklands, East——

Mr. Tom Clarke: West.

Mr. Forsyth: I know that the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) made it clear that he does not agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) on some matters when he intervened earlier. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that——

Mr. Clarke: For the sake of the record, let me make it clear that I have a remarkably good working relationship with my right hon. and learned Friend, who is a very generous man, as the Minister will find in a few months' time.

Mr. Forsyth: I am not sure that, when the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East reads what the hon. Gentleman had to say in distancing himself from the view that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has expressed about containing public expenditure promises, the relationship will be as strong as it was before. The hon. Gentleman may have put a little pressure on it this evening.

Amendment No. 61 fulfils the undertaking that was given in Committee. Therefore, I suggest that amendment No. 64 is unnecessary because it is already covered by amendment No. 61. I draw the attention of the House to clause 21 and to the Secretary of State's power by order to require the boards of management to publish information. Government amendments Nos. 28 and 29 highlight the learning difficulties aspect.

8 pm

Mr. Stephen: The Minister has made my point—not resisted it. The impact of student welfare on education should be and is the responsibility of the Scottish Office. Who monitors student welfare and its impact on the completion of courses? The Minister explained that the Scottish Office is currently looking into the matter. Presumably it will consider whether financial implications are one of the reasons for the high number of drop-outs from Scottish institutions. Although I repeat that this matter should be and is the concern of the Scottish Office and its education department, all we have seen from the Minister is a lack of concern for student welfare or a fear of what might be found if the Higher Education Funding Council was required to produce such an annual report.

I know that training is important to the Government, but we cannot treat our young people simply as if they were the feedstock of industry. One does not get the best performance from an individual if one simply trains that person; one must also treat people well. The Government, however, have neglected that important aspect of our education system and, as a result, the Conservative party is treated dismissively by many students in Scotland. I know that the Minister visits universities and other institutions from time to time, and I can assure him that that neglect is one reason for the hostile reception that he receives from a significant number of students in Scotland.

The new clause is crucial to the future quality of education in Scotland, as well as to student welfare. Sadly, I cannot accept the Minister's assurance.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 108, Noes 235.

Division No. 71] **[8.1 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Bellotti, David
Benton, Joseph
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helnns N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. James Wallace.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Colvin, Michael
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian

Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 14

QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN RESPECT OF INSTITUTIONS WITHOUT DEGREE-AWARDING POWERS

'—The Council shall secure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions without degree-awarding powers by maintaining—

(a) Control system for credit rating courses and training;
(b) A national access courses recognition scheme; and
(c) A service for C.N.A.A. graduates and employees to verify awards, replace certificates and provide related information.'.—*[Mr. Ernie Ross.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Ernie Ross: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) has just left the Chamber to have a cup of tea. His absence should not be taken as a lack of interest in the new clause on his part. He invited me to come forward to the Front Bench, but I think that that gesture would be to exaggerate. I have never had a need to stand leaning on a box, so I shall stay where I am. That is not meant to show disrespect to the Minister or the Secretary of State.

We thought it important in Committee to discuss the decision by the Secretary of State for Scotland, in conjunction with the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Education and Science, to end the function of the Council for National Academic Awards. It was incorporated in 1965 and has played a significant role in helping to develop within the polytechnics and centrally funded institutions in Scotland a type of education similar to the provision found in all our universities. Its mission has been directed more towards industry than pure research. We are worried about the ending of its role and want to know what the Scottish Office believes should fill the vacuum.

8.15 pm

In Committee, we discussed quality assessment, but we did not get round to discussing pages 26 and 27 of the Government's White Paper, "Higher Education: A New Framework", which refers to the need for a quality audit. What provision will be made to ensure that there is an organisation with responsibility

> "for assessing the quality of education provided in institutions without degree-awarding powers by maintaining—
>
> (a) Control system for credit rating courses and training;
> (b) A national access courses recognition scheme; and
> (c) A service for CNAA graduates and employees to verify awards."?

We raise the matter to find out what the Minister thinks about this and to express some of the CNAA's concerns which we could not discuss in Committee. I know that our colleagues will discuss this on the Floor of the House when the Bill that applies to England and Wales returns from the other place.

I should like to depict the specific relation that the CNAA has had in developing the central institutions in Scotland. That is important because they have developed similarly to, but differently from, those in England and Wales.

It should be noted that there has never been a formal polytechnic sector of higher education in Scotland. For 20 years, from the inception in England and Wales in the late 1960s of a polytechnic system involving the amalgamation of colleges of art, commerce, education and technology to form large institutions, the Scottish Office Education Department prohibited the introduction of a similar system in Scotland, and instead insisted on a distinctively Scottish arrangement. That has resulted in the present family of 17 centrally funded colleges, comprising 12 central institutions and five colleges of education.

Those centrally funded colleges, which have been under central Government control for many decades, have been shaped by SOED policies and practices. A result is that they are generally much smaller than polytechnics in England, partly because of the absence of mergers, partly because SOED has limited the fields in which they have been allowed to operate and partly because they have not been permitted to make provision for the humanities in the courses that they offer. In that sense, there were no polytechnics in Scotland.

For two decades, it has seemed to central institutions that the Scottish Office was not minded to encourage them to gain the polytechnic title. About three years ago, there was a sudden change of stance. The SOED acceded to a request from Napier college to call itself Napier polytechnic of Edinburgh, and some time later it approved a similar application from Glasgow college. There does not seem to have been any rhyme or reason to that. Certainly there was no major debate in this House beforehand. Up until then, the SOED had driven the centrally funded institutions in a particular direction.

Within the system, the centrally funded colleges are divided into sub-sectors, each of which comprises institutions having cognate interests—the art schools, the colleges of education and the technological institutions. Those groupings have evolved in different ways, and they differ greatly in size. The five technological central institutions—Dundee institute of technology, Glasgow polytechnic, Napier polytechnic of Edinburgh, Paisley college and the Robert Gordon institute of technology —have become the closest analogues to the polytechnics south of the border.

Their origins and missions are similar to those of the polytechnics. They have a similar concentration on vocational higher education—it is even more pronounced in the Scottish institutions—and they all have similar links with industry, commerce and the professions. They make similar provision for many levels of study, ranging from certificates to higher degrees. They offer extensive programmes of applied research and provide consultancy services. In common with the polytechnics south of the border, those colleges are also responsible for managing their own financial, administrative and legal affairs.

Those characteristics are shared, to a varying extent, by the other sub-sectors into which the centrally funded colleges are divided. However, the technological central institutions have additional features that are not found in the other centrally funded colleges. For that reason, they are more like polytechnics, because those technological central institutions provide for a wide range of disciplines and have substantial programmes of applied research. They are the largest centrally funded colleges and together account for more than half the total students in the Scottish centrally funded sector.

At the moment, those institutions are accredited by the CNAA. In addition, their close affinity with the polytechnics is reflected in the fact that their principals are full members of the Committee of the Directors of Polytechnics.

I have outlined the way in which the centrally funded institutions, in particular the five technological ones, operated until the Bill was introduced. Under the Bill, the Secretary of State has given directions that the five technological institutions will have full degree-awarding powers. He has also said that four of them will be allowed to take the title of university. The one technological institution outside that grouping is the Dundee institute of technology.

In Committee, I discussed with the Minister what would happen to the Dundee institute of technology once the CNAA no longer existed. I wanted to know to which club that institute would belong. It is not a university, but it has full degree-awarding powers and, obviously, it would want to market itself in those terms. That institution needs to be part of a club to which it can relate.

In the past all the technological institutions could relate to the CNAA. If a person who had been awarded a degree at one of those central technological institutions wanted to prove where that degree was lodged and recorded, the CNAA was able to assure existing employers, future employers and others in industry that that person's degree had the proper accreditation.

The mission of those central technological institutions was specifically directed towards industry. That was reflected in the make up of those institutions' boards of governors. Their courses were also assessed by a much wider grouping than that which assesses a university's degrees. The CNAA is concerned about the proposed changes and we want to know from the Minister whether he has thought them through.

As I understand it, some central institutions in Scotland will still be regarded as designated institutions, and their degrees will have to be accredited either by former central institutions that now have the title of university, or by one of the existing universities. If those institutions seek to meet the criteria laid down by the Government for the award of university title, there will be no drive and determination to do so, because the CNAA will no longer exist. Therefore, there will be no body to which those institutions can relate other than the institute with which they have an association for the accreditation of their degrees.

I know that discussions have taken place between ministerial officials and the Dundee institute of technology. We should like to know whether that dialogue has achieved any progress, or whether we are still where we were prior to the 29 January discussions. It is important to know the answer, if only because the board of governors of Dundee institute of technology, its previous students and those now engaged in academic study there want to know what status will be attached to the institution that will award or has awarded their degrees. To which club, or organisation, will that institute be able to attach itself? Will there be a central institution in England and Wales which has a similar role to that of the institute—an ability to award degrees without the title of university?

It is unfortunate that we did not debate in great depth the content of the quality audit section of "Higher Education: A New Framework", because concern is felt by many, not just the Dundee institute of technology. For example, the director of the Glasgow school of art, Dugald Cameron, wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie:

> "Glasgow School of Art is an associated institution within CNAA and its students in Art and Design are currently registered for degrees validated by this body. With the effective ending of CNAA in September 1992 what is the position of the bulk of students who, properly enrolled by GSA, had expected to graduate with CNAA degrees after that body's dissolution? . . . It seems rather odd that the 27 years experience of quality assessment which the CNAA possess should be airily dismissed in favour of what may seem to be, at best, rather 'ad hoc' arrangements."

What are those ad hoc arrangements? Given that we were unable to discuss the quality audit section within "Higher Education: A New Framework", it is important to learn from the Minister how he believes that quality audit will be established.

From paragraphs 67, 68 and 69 of the document, it appears that the general intention is to establish a quality audit section for England and Wales. However, there appears to be no intention to establish a separate quality audit unit for Scotland. One assumes that there will be a separate quality assessment unit for Scotland, but I wonder whether the Minister can tell us if there will be a separate quality unit for Scotland. I appreciate that we are talking not just about former central institutions, but about universities and the new designated institutions that will have the title of university.

Paragraph 69 states:

> "The Government will discuss with representatives of the institution the nature and development of such a quality audit unit. It will expect the unit's steering council to have industrial and professional as well as academic members and to admit assessors from the Funding Councils to its meetings."

We must know what the make-up of that quality audit unit will be, especially with regard to the technological institutions that existed previously.

Paragraph 70 states:

> "The Government intends to include reserve powers in the legislation to ensure the satisfactory establishment of the unit."

Will that unit be in place by September 1992? The Minister of State seems to be nodding his head——

Mr. Michael Forsyth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Ross: If the Minister is not nodding his head, the question is relevant. If the unit will not be in place by September 1992, will the CNAA have a life beyond September 1992? Those institutions need an assurance about that.

The Minister should respond to that question to satisfy not only the present members of the CNAA but those institutions that have been associated with it and students who, over the years, have gained their degrees from it. Will there be an after-care service for CNAA graduates? The archive records of some 790,000 students must be looked after. Will resources be provided for that? Exactly what will happen?

It was with those questions in mind that I tabled the new clause. I hope that it will not be necessary to push it to a vote, but that the Minister will satisfy all those concerned about the matter. I look forward to his response.

8.30 pm

Mr. Douglas: I support the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) on that issue, and I declare a long-standing interest. I was involved, in the Dundee college of technology, in bringing the CNAA into the department of commerce and economics at the university. That must be 25 or 30 years ago. I have corresponded with the Minister on that matter. The points raised by the hon. Member for Dundee, West require specific answers.

To use the analogy of what happened when previous central institutions became universities, when the Scottish college of commerce and the Royal college of science and technology were merged to become the university of Strathclyde, the university offered students associated with either of those institutions an option of becoming graduates of the university. Instead of associateships with commerce or economics, they could obtain a BA. I hope that that covers the hon. Gentleman's point about bringing students into an on-going institution in terms of its archives and records of academic credentials for the future.

I am not as conversant with the matter as I might be, but I understand that the CNAA will disappear and that Dundee college will not become a university. If so, what happens to the quality assessment of its degrees? The Secretary of State cannot divest himself of responsibility. The college in Dundee was, so far as I can remember, the first in Scotland to make arrangements with the CNAA.

I speak only from a commerce and economics point of view, but I remember that the CNAA was stringent in terms of external examinations—and rightly so—before it gave its imprimatur to the lecturing in the college of technology. The Minister cannot leave Dundee college in suspended animation. He has some responsibility not just to the students who have gone there, which is an important factor, but to those who might want to go there because of its good reputation in commerce, engineering and other spheres.

The Minister cannot dodge answering the questions raised by the hon. Member for Dundee, West. Students who enter such an institution will be uncertain how industrialists and commercial enterprises will view their degrees. Will the Minister clear up the matter and try to set it at rest?

Mr. Watson: I reinforce the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas). We require answers on the issue because it was not discussed in Committee. I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to clear up a number of outstanding questions asked by previous speakers.

The Bill for England and Wales provides for the dissolution of the CNAA but the Bill under discussion does not mention it. The CNAA's tentacles stretch deeply into Scottish education and the knock-on effect is, therefore, obvious.

The quality assessment committees to be established by both Bills provide for quality assurances once the new universities have the right to award degrees, but a considerable gap remains to be filled and I hope that the Minister will go some way towards filling it this evening. What will happen when the Council for National Academic Awards is wound up later this year? That organisation has welcomed the proposals and the reforms contained in them but has expressed many anxieties. It has cautioned against the speed with which the Bill is being introduced, and that has been echoed by Opposition Members during Second Reading and in Committee. That will create concern among existing students and those applying for courses beginning later this year.

When the CNAA is wound up, many of the 300,000 students, UK-wide—some 10 per cent. of whom are in Scotland—will be some way short of completing their courses. They will be left in what has been termed the no man's land between being part of an institution with degree-awarding powers and a CNAA accredited course.

The proposed arrangements fail to cater for students enrolled in institutions which will not be given degree-awarding powers and which have been unable to forge a link with a degree-awarding institution before the start of the new academic session later this year. Also left high and dry are what the CNAA describe as

[Mr. Watson]

"the 500 research degree students registered by CNAA through non-educational establishments e.g. industrial, commercial or research laboratories and hospitals".

The CNAA has advocated that those students should be transferred to a national degree-awarding body such as the Open University. The Open University is ideally qualified to take on that role. The Labour party advocates that in the Bill on English and Welsh higher education. The suggestion is sensible and I shall be interested to hear what the Minister says about it. The Open University has the necessary expertise and range of courses. However, were it to take on that role, we would have to ask for what the Minister considers to be a dirty word—resources. It cannot be done without providing adequate resources. Many thousands of students deserve adequate accreditation for their courses and a clear idea of who will award their degrees. If that means additional resources, the Minister and the Government should face up to that throughout the United Kingdom.

It is estimated that there are about 40,000 students in the United Kingdom, a disproportionate number of whom attend Scottish institutions that will not receive degree-awarding status. Those students applied for and were accepted on courses to study for CNAA awards. They will now have no choice but to accept an award from whichever validating organisation the institution at which they are studying is able to find. That is a haphazard process—there is only a short time between now and September when the CNAA is to be wound up. Students applying for courses that start this autumn will enter a foggy area where there is no clear idea of what awards they can expect to gain, which is unsatisfactory and highlights the vacuum that will exist.

Attempts to find an academic partner to validate courses will be made more difficult by the unchallengeable fact that no existing degree-awarding institution has anything like the range of awards available through the CNAA, which relates to my remarks on the Open University. There is nothing like the spread of courses. Even our most esteemed academic institutions have nothing like the spread of courses that the CNAA offers.

What will happen to the institutions and students caught in that no man's land because the rules have been changed once the game is under way? That is not simply unfair, but unsettling for students and employers, who also need to know about the graduates who will be applying to them for posts during the next two years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West referred to an aftercare service, which will be of as much concern to employers as to students. The CNAA has brought together graduates and employers, but that role will disappear without any obvious replacement. The new clause provides a safety net to replace the ad hoc arrangements that appear to apply, at least in the intervening period. I hope that the Minister will answer the questions and be prepared to accept the new clause in the spirit in which it was intended so as to assist students, past and present, and the employers who hope to link up with them in the near future.

Mr. Dalyell: I wish to express my support for my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), and to recognise that the representations of Professor Edwards and his colleagues are valid.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The clause covers a number of important issues on which I am glad to have the opportunity to say a few words. First, I should emphasise that the Bill places an obligation on the new funding council to assess the quality of education provided in all institutions which it funds, whether or not they have degree-awarding powers. That assessment of quality will then be used to inform the funding provided by the council for teaching. All three territorial funding councils will undertake such quality assessment. In addition, there will be a quality audit unit run on a United Kingdom-wide basis by the institutions themselves. It may be helpful if I make the distinction between quality assessment and audit. Quality assessment will look at the quality of the teaching itself with a view to informing funding decisions. Quality audit will examine the quality control systems put in place by the institutions themselves to ensure that they are adequate.

The specific subject of credit rating for courses is an area where Scottish institutions can take some pride. The Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme—or SCOTCATS—involves all Scottish higher education institutions and covers courses from a higher national certificate to a full honours degree. I know that the institutions are very keen to continue that scheme and are looking at ways of doing so through the quality audit unit.

Mr. Ernie Ross: The Minister mentioned quality assessment and quality audit—the two are quite different. If the Minister has said all that he intends to say, he has missed out on an important aspect. It was the mission of the technological institutions that was important within the quality audit. Their mission was technologically and industrially driven.

Mr. Forsyth: I was making the distinction between quality assessment and quality audit. I know that the hon. Gentleman is particularly concerned about the Dundee institute of technology. His constituency interests mean that that institution is rightly at the forefront of his mind. However, the circumstances of that institute, on which we have corresponded, are not related to the new clause.

8.45 pm

Wider access to higher education is a vital part of our proposals. Last year, 9,400 mature students entered full-time higher education in Scotland. That is an increase of more than 80 per cent. since 1979. That reflects particularly well on the Scottish wider access programme which we introduced in 1988. It will continue unaffected by our higher education reforms.

New clause 14 raises the position of graduates and employees of the Council for National Academic Awards after its dissolution. Perhaps I could take this opportunity to pay tribute to the CNAA. Too often in the past, public sector bodies have become self-perpetuating bureaucracies. The CNAA has avoided that—indeed, it has—*[Laughter]*—made a remarkable——

Mr. Watson *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: May I just try to finish reading this sentence.

The CNAA has scored the remarkable achievement of working itself out of a job by bringing the present non-university higher education institutions to their present academic maturity. Arrangements are already in hand for it to be wound down in an orderly way. We agree that there must be what might be called an after care service for its graduates and employees.

Mr. Watson: The brief is perhaps not the best that the Minister has been given.

The new clause contains an error which I had not noticed until now. The new clause contains a misprint. The Minister has twice mentioned the words that appear in the new clause "graduates and employees", but we are talking not about employees of CNAA, but about employers.

Paragraph (c) should refer to employers with whom the graduates want to link up. I apoloigise for that printing error which may have misled the Minister and may explain why he is uncharacteristically unsure.

Mr. Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that elucidation. I agree that we also need an after care service to help employers.

Some of the CNAA's present work will fall to the new quality audit unit. The Open University is currently working on detailed proposals to assume the function of maintaining CNAA records, particularly the academic records of graduates. The Open University already has g[illegible] experience of that function through its present work.

Hon. Members will have seen that work is already in hand to address the issues to which new clause 14 refers. Therefore, I invite the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) to withdraw it.

Mr. Ernie Ross: With the leave of the House, may I say that we had some lighter moments in Committee, which usually occurred either when the Minister was not enjoying reading his brief or when the brief, for some reason, did not seem to fit in with what he was trying to say. Today we seem to have encountered that problem.

What we are trying to do is important. We are concerned about the mission of the central institutions. Their teaching mission has always been slightly different from that of universities, mainly because the Scottish Education Department deliberately did not allow them to diverge into the humanities but kept them on a narrow, industry-based system of teaching and degree awarding. We are concerned that the quality audit unit should be established quickly so that the new institutions, which will have university title, will not wander away and that we will retain in Scotland technology-based institutions.

Mr. Forsyth: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps I stuck too rigidly to my brief. He asked me about the importance of establishing the quality audit unit and when it would be in place. I share his concern about it. I expect that the audit unit will be in place by September of this year.

Mr. Ernie Ross: This brief debate has been important. Our colleagues in another place may want to return to the issue to clarify that we are all talking about the same thing. Given what the Minister has just said, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 15

INSPECTION

'The Secretary of State shall ensure that inspection is made from time to time by Her Majesty's Inspectors of provision for students with learning difficulties in Colleges of Further Education.'.—*[Mrs. Margaret Ewing.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 63, in clause 1, page 1, line 13, at end add—

'(2A) In discharging his duty under subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State shall ensure that no student under the age of 25 who has learning difficulties shall be required to pay a fee for Further Education.'.

Amendment No. 58, in clause 2, page 2, line 16, at end add

'; and in exercising such power they shall have regard to the requirements of persons over school age who have learning difficulties.'.

Government amendments Nos. 16 and 21.

Amendment No. 67, in clause 8, page 5, line 24, leave out 'disabled students and staff' and insert

'students with learning difficulties and disabled staff.'.

Government amendments Nos. 22 and 28.

Amendment No. 68, in page 16, line 30, at end insert

'including the educational provision made or proposed to be made for persons with learning difficulties and the facilities made or proposed to be made to meet the needs of disabled students and staff.'.

Government amendments Nos. 83, 29 and 48.

Amendment No. 74, in schedule 1, page 40, line 31, at end insert—

'(1A) Where the number of students with learning difficulties at a College of Further Education exceeds such number as may be prescribed, the Board shall establish a Special Needs Advisory Committee, including persons with experience of the needs of students with learning difficulties.'.

Mrs. Ewing: Those of us who served in Committee will recall the debate on the inspection of courses offered at colleges of further education whereby the courses for youngsters with special learning needs or any disability would have to be inspected. The Minister undertook to consult the chief inspector about such matters as regularity of inspection.

The new clause focuses on special needs in colleges, a subject which was not debated in Committee, when the debate was about inspection in general. There is some reason to be concerned that at present the inspection of special needs courses is less than adequate, in that it has been added to the remit of one or two inspectors who are already over-burdened. That is understandable. I am not trying to demean the work undertaken by inspectors; I am trying to draw attention to the fact that they are asked to take on an additional burden in a difficult job. I hope that consideration will be given to appointing others or ensuring that time is made available to them to undertake the training and qualifications necessary to execute this important task.

We are speaking against a background of the recent development of courses. Many of them have been established at the initiative of individual colleges or education authorities, or a combination of both.

[Mrs. Ewing]

Sometimes voluntary organisations have been involved. They have not been set up because of central Government policy.

I wish to ensure that, when further education colleges are devolved, as suggested in the Bill, the Scottish Office Education Department takes the same approach as it does to other areas of education, which is not just a monitoring role but one of spreading and promoting good policy, and presumably identifying the need for staff training purposes. I referred to that extensively in Committee, because I believe that many colleges throughout Scotland have set up substantial and effective programmes of education for people with special learning needs or specific handicaps.

It seems ridiculous that many colleges are trying to reinvent the wheel. Given the pressures on staff time and resources, including financial resources, it is an important aspect of the inspectorate's job to ensure that good practice, wherever it is encountered, is taken up by other colleges, with the recommendations of those who invented the courses. I hope that the Minister will take that seriously.

As was also brought out in Committee, the inspectorate is seen, generally speaking, as a positive and valued force. The whole tenor of the new clause is to ensure that that is in no way diminished by the changes proposed in the Bill. Students with learning difficulties, and staff working with them, will inevitably form a comparatively small part of any college. I refer the Minister to the statistics given in Committee. An inspectorate with a specialist but wide-ranging role will be able to assist in keeping them up to date with developments elsewhere. All of us would endorse that aim, because, as Members of Parliament or even in our families, we know of people with particular needs which should be recognised and given the respect which they require.

As well as new knowledge about such matters as educational techniques, new technologies are coming into existence to assist students with various types of handicap. An inspectorate could provide a valuable source of information and assistance, as well as ensuring the maintenance of standards.

I do not want to go through all the amendments which are being considered with the new clause, save to say that we are all striving for the same goal. Hon. Members on both sides have spoken at length and with great sincerity on previous occasions about their wish to see students with special needs given recognition. New clause 15, with the amendments, would bring about that wish. Therefore, I hope that the Minister will give us the good news that he will accept the new clause.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has been most persuasive. Where there is a demand for positive discrimination, an inspectorate such as she described seems appropriate. I think that she made a good case. The Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped agrees with the new clause, and I hope that the Minister will address himself seriously to the points which have been made.

I should like to refer to amendments Nos. 63, 67, 68 and 74 which have been tabled by my hon. Friends and myself. It will come as no surprise to the House and to my hon. Friends who served so well in Committee to learn that we are dealing with the important point of access. We have been very much aware of the importance of access throughout our consideration of the Bill. In both further and higher education, we want to improve access for a much larger number of people than our education system has been able to deal with so far.

Earlier this evening, the Minister referred to the Scottish wider access programme. I hope that he will feel that these constructive amendments, which reflect our arguments in Committee, are not inconsistent with what we were told were the objectives of that programme, even though they may not yet have been achieved.

Amendment No. 63 is designed to provide for students with learning difficulties who require longer to complete their courses precisely because of their disabilities. I have been paying great attention to debates in another place and particularly to a debate on 14 January on the analogous English legislation. So far, the English Bill has focused much more clearly on this matter than we have managed with the Scottish one. If our colleagues dealing with English further education have managed to persuade themselves—rightly—that new bodies should seek adequate provision for the under-25s, there must also be a duty to provide free further education for people with disabilities and learning needs. That case is argued for in the amendment.

9 pm

The Government have given a commitment that students between 16 and 18 will not be required to pay fees for further education—a welcome reassurance. We seek to extend that to the world in which such students actually have to live. It is self-evident that students with learning difficulties are willing and able to learn but inevitably often do so more slowly. Students with cerebral palsy, for instance, have communication difficulties. The expectation that they should complete difficult courses despite their difficulties at the same pace as their fellow students seems both unreasonable and unrealistic. Many of these people continue to develop for several years after they reach the age of 18, and they would derive considerable benefit from completing a course of further education that students without disabilities would usually complete before 18.

Students with physical disabilities may also need to take longer over their courses. I witnessed the problems of physical access in my local college in Coatbridge last Friday. Despite an excellent determination to ensure that facilities are available there, the problems of physical access remain self-evident.

Disability sometimes means that students have to use special aids or techniques to carry out course work—not always an easy task, as we agreed in Committee. Computer aids can be excellent tools for disabled people, but they are often laborious to operate, especially for people who are physically disadvantaged. People with visual handicaps do not enjoy the easy access to written materials that sighted people enjoy. The Government must accept that these people need longer; they often cannot earn money, and they experience real poverty.

Many people with disabilities have associated health problems that may require them to take time off from a course of further education. All hon. Members have personal experience of such cases. Despite personal heroism by the sufferers, their health problems often mean that they have to break off for treatment or to recharge their batteries. No one should disregard that point.

It would be helpful if the Government told us their views on the bursary system. It is doubtful whether it provides the complete answer, although the Minister depended on it a great deal in Committee. Bursaries may vary across Scotland, and they provide no guarantee that the problem will be properly dealt with.

The Government have given us some welcome commitments about disabled students but it is most important for many disabled students to be sure that it is worth starting a course because they will be able to finish it in their own time. They cannot be expected to afford fees if they have been taking further education courses since leaving school.

Funding is certainly a complex issue, and the Government have a number of mechanisms for deciding whether fees are charged and whether they are paid by students. Rather than leaving this matter to the vagaries of the bursary system, with all its complexities, the Government should give disabled students a clear commitment: those who require longer to complete their courses will be able to do so.

Through amendments Nos. 67 and 68, we seek not only to tidy up the wording but to introduce some sophistication. Our view is shared by the Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped and by people such as Hugh Stewart, Colin Mackay, Brian Lamb and Pauline Graham of the Spastics Society, who feel that our terminology in legislation should be brought up to date, especially remembering our links with Europe.

Amendment No. 74 seeks to ensure that the boards are properly advised about the needs of students with learning difficulties. Our argument here is absolutely consistent with the main thrust of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, which accepted that people with disabilities had the right to have an input in policy formulation when decisions were taken which influenced the quality of their lives.

Although the duty of colleges to have regard for students with learning difficulties is welcome, it must be remembered that the colleges will be run largely by business people. I do not want to be too harsh on them, and we shall see what happens. However, it must be said that the quota system——

Mr. Ernie Ross: It is 3 per cent.

Mr. Clarke: The quota is 3 per cent., yet it has never been achieved. We seem to be asking the same people to accept that there should be positive discrimination within the college system, which has not been the case so far.

Mr. Ross: My hon. Friend's point is significant. In industry, we have discovered that there has been a lot of pressure on individuals either not to label themselves as disabled or to say that they are disabled simply to try to help the employers in their minimum commitment to the 3 per cent. quota. Those same employers could be on the boards of governors and might adopt the same attitude, which would put on students the pressure which is put on employees in industry. That would not be acceptable.

Mr. Clarke: As always, my hon. Friend makes his point extremely well. The boards, with the problems of cash limits and budgets, would not, on the evidence so far, see a commitment to people with special needs as a priority.

If we have not persuaded the Minister of our case for representation, it is important that at least he gives some thought to the amendments. There is no guarantee that business people will know anything about the real needs of students with learning difficulties, which creates the danger that the boards will fulfil the responsibility to people with special needs in a token and ill-informed way. That is unacceptable, especially in view of the recent education review.

In Committee, as the Minister will recall, the Government rejected an amendment that the college boards should be required to include a person with suitable experience. The Minister argued that one person could not be expected to represent all the different types of student with learning difficulties. Even if that argument has merit, an alternative is that the whole board could be advised by a committee which would include disabled students and their representatives. That is a reasonable request.

During the debate on the Further and Higher Education Bill in the other place, the Government stated, as the Minister will be aware, that the new funding councils would be required to obtain specialist advice on the needs of disabled students as a condition of their grants. In Scotland, the lack of a similar funding council seems to place a greater responsibility on individual colleges. It is important, therefore, to ensure that any college that caters for a significant number of students with learning difficulties should have a source of specialist advice about the needs of those students. In that spirit, I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. McMaster: I shall be as brief as possible. Although I support the case that has been put for new clause 15, I want to devote my remarks to the three amendments Nos. 63, 68 and 74. They deal with the three barriers to disabled people and those with learning difficulties entering further education—financial, physical and psychological. The amendments would help to break down those barriers.

I echo the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Monklands—[Hon. Members: "Hon. Friend."] If my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) is not a right hon. Member, he should be. He said that we welcomed the Minister's commitment to not charging fees to people with learning difficulties aged between 16 and 18. I support amendment No. 63, which would extend that provision to the age of 25. By definition, people with learning difficulties have special reasons for being slower and having to work at their own speed with student-centred learning. Again by definition, disabled people are likely to be poorer because disablement costs money in all sorts of ways, not least in transport costs. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) mentioned Oatridge agricultural college, which does valuable work in horticulture and agriculture. However, people have to travel to get there, and those costs have to be met by disabled people who come from a large catchment area.

The same applies in Glasgow. Woodburn house is part of Landside college, and its catchment area is practically the whole of Strathclyde region. People have to travel from a wide area to get there. Money should not be a barrier to disabled people and those with learning difficulties entering college. There is an untapped pool of talent among disabled people. It is not only a crime against those people not to tap into their talent; it is a crime against society.

[Mr. McMaster]

There is another benefit from further education for disabled people, and that is the respite provided to their carers and families—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to be brief, but there are important points to be made.

On amendment No. 68, my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West said that, under the new set-up, colleges will be run by business men. Business men and women have no great record in serving the needs of disabled people. The quota system was mentioned earlier. Only 24 per cent. of organisations in this country achieved the 3 per cent. quota, and Government Departments are not among them. The Scottish health service achieves only 0·2 per cent. and the House of Commons only 0·6 per cent. The Minister shakes his head, so I must tell him that those figures come from a parliamentary written answer from him. *[Interruption.]* The figures could be doubtful, of course.

Those who argue that in dealing with the learning needs of disabled people persuasion will work and that colleges will somehow serve them without any statutory obligation to do so should understand that all the evidence of legislation on the disabled shows that that is not the case. Where such legislation has been voluntary in its implementation, most have chosen not to implement it.

9.15 pm

If performance measurement systems are to be introduced, and if they are to be based purely on the quantity of students who come through the door rather than on the quality [illegible] that they receive, the day on which those systems are introduced will be a sad one. Disablement resettlement officers, through no fault of theirs, have been measured according to the number of disabled people whom they help to enter employment; they are therefore naturally likely to go for people who have lost the tip of a pinkie in an industrial accident rather than the disabled people who need help most.

My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West said, when introducing what became the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, that disabled people should not constantly be "done unto". That is what amendment No. 74 is all about. It is essential that a special needs advisory committee be set up: after all, if there are 6·5 million disabled people in the United Kingdom, about 10 per cent.—roughly 650,000—will be in Scotland, and those people deserve to have their voices heard.

I do not think that there will be a shortage of people who could be called on to serve on an advisory body. There are, for instance, the voluntary bodies, which do such valuable work. A constituent of mine, who is also a friend—a girl called Morag Clunas, who has been disabled from birth—has fought a battle to get through the education system. She is now working for Renfrew district disability council, and is campaigning on behalf of other disabled people. She has seen the education battle from all sides, and was recently given an award by Commissioner Millan for her achievements.

We must emphasise ability rather than disability. If the Minister can come some of the way with us, he will be seen to be paying lip service, at least, to the education needs of disabled people—and we want more than that.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on moving new clause 15. She concluded an earlier speech with a quotation from Burns. Like much that comes from her party, it was a misquotation: according to my memory of "Tam O'Shanter", the advice relayed by her national bard was given to a husband by his wife, not by an Opposition to a Government. Perhaps I may reciprocate by commending a quotation from Burns to the hon. Lady. In "The Dumfries Volunteers", Burns writes:

"Be Britain still to Britain true,
Among oursel's united!
For never but by British hands
Maun British wrangs be righted!"

The hon. Lady might care to memorise that quotation, and recite it to herself in the weeks and months to come.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: I am grateful to the Minister. I do not wish to turn this into an entirely cultural debate, because serious issues are at stake. Does the Minister agree, however, that those words were written under duress, at a time of great difficulty for the bard? Perhaps he wrote more effectively when he spoke of

"such a parcel o' rogues in a nation".

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Lady's analysis of the time when the piece was written. Another line may commend itself to her:

"O let us not, like snarlinghe tykes,
In wrangling be divided".

In view of that, perhaps I should return to the subject of new clause 15, which would require the Secretary of State to ensure that Her Majesty's inspector of schools inspects provision in further education colleges for students with learning difficulties.

The Secretary of State already has power, under section 66 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, to cause inspections to be made of any educational establishment. Those inspections are carried out by Her Majesty's inspectorate. The provision of further education for students with learning difficulties is covered by the inspectorate, which will advise the Secretary of State on the exercise of his duty for further education, including the requirement to have regard to the needs of those with learning difficulties.

I shall be happy to give the hon. Lady an undertaking that I shall discuss with the senior chief inspector appropriate arrangements in that regard. As a first step to add to the Department's knowledge of the extent of the provision and existing good practice, it is intended to appoint soon, on secondment, an expert from a college to report on the matter.

Mrs. Ewing: Can the Minister tell me how many reports have been submitted from the inspectorate specifically on the needs of youngsters with special learning difficulties at further education colleges and what impact that has had on central Government thinking, in terms of planning? When the Minister has spoken to the inspectorate about the content of my new clause, which is supported by other hon. Members, will he consider introducing an amendment in the other place to take account of the genuine concerns of all of us on this side of the House, which have been endorsed by all the societies and organisations that work with handicapped people, be they mentally or physically handicapped?

Mr. Forsyth: After my discussions with the senior chief inspector, I shall ensure that the hon. Lady is provided with that information. It is unnecessary to amend the Bill to ensure good practice by the inspectorate. They work very hard to ensure good practice. We discussed in Committee an amendment similar to amendment No. 63. I said then that I do not consider that there is a strong case for accepting the amendment. Students over 18 are able to apply for bursaries. The bursary scheme allows colleges to give special consideration to disabled students. In my view, these arrangements provide a sufficient safeguard for students with learning difficulties.

I was puzzled by what the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) said about the differences between England and Scotland. The position seems to me to be absolutely identical, so I was puzzled by the suggestion that he might want to elaborate on the point that he made in his speech.

In addition, boards have the power, in clause 8(2) *(c)*

"to provide to students of the college such assistance of a financial or other nature as they may consider appropriate".

Government amendment No. 20 to clause 8, which I hope we shall discuss later, makes it clear that this includes the ability to waive or grant remission of fees. For students with or without learning difficulties, some boards may well exercise that power. Each case is likely to be very different. The boards will be best placed to make judgments rather than the blanket provision that the amendment would introduce.

As for amendment No. 58, I have no doubt that local authorities will take account of the needs of those with learning difficulties when judging when to use their powers to provide further education. The Bill is about the transfer of further education from local authority management and establishing boards of management. It is not about extending obligations on local authorities. They must decide how to exercise their functions within their duties and powers.

Mr. Tom Clarke: As this is a serious point, I want to be absolutely clear about where the Government stand. I referred to the discussions in another place on 14 January when clearly Government Ministers accepted that, if a funding council in England was unable to secure provision for such students, a duty was placed upon them to find places and to make sure that the cost was met. I am not aware, though I invite the Minister to clarify the point, of a similar provision having been included in the Bill. If there is such a provision, I hope that he will reassure me. It is important that he should answer my question.

Mr. Forsyth: I have no direct responsibility for the arrangements in England, but I am advised that there is no provision in England and Wales for students with learning difficulties between the ages of 18 and 25 not to be charged fees. The position in England and Wales, therefore, is identical to that in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman is, I believe, referring to an amendment that was accepted: that the funding council can secure provision for those with learning difficulties outside the further education sector. That is not required in Scotland, as there is no upper age limit on the Secretary of State's duties or on the bodies that he can fund, including organisations other than the boards. The position, therefore, is identical. Does the hon. Gentleman want to intervene on that point?

Mr. Clarke: I cannot agree with the Minister that the position is identical. I realise that perhaps understandably he has not had as much time to consider the matter as he would have wished. However, I spent a lot of time last night with Scottish and English organisations which work in this field and the one issue on which they all agreed was that the two positions are not identical.

Mr. Forsyth: That is probably right, but the positions are identical in terms of effect, although the reasons why they are identical may differ north and south of the border.

Mr. Clarke: So they are not identical?

Mr. Forsyth: From the point of view of a student with learning difficulties who is aged over 18 the position is identical, but the means by which that commonality has been achieved is different. I should have thought that people would not be specially concerned about the statutory basis on which that has been achieved.

Mr. Clarke: With respect, the Minister is uncharacteristically confused about the facts. He has not had time to get the facts together. He is wrong and, given that fact and the fact that he has not had time to do his homework, will he at the very least hold his hand until the Bill is dealt with in another place?

Mr. Forsyth: If I am wrong, it is because I have been advised in a way which is not in accordance with the advice to the hon. Gentleman. I think the advice that I am receiving from officials is perhaps more likely to be authoritative than that to the hon. Gentleman, but I am happy to consider the point he has raised. However, he must not chide me for not being up to date on English legislation. The Bill is a Scottish Bill and the provisions in it——

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) will allow me to deal with the hon. Member for Monklands, West, I shall give way to him.

It seems that the arrangements being made in the Bill for students with learning difficulties are perfectly adequate. Existing powers provide for bursaries to be made available and that seems to be the best way of approaching the matter.

Mr. Douglas: I hope that the Minister can help me by clarifying this matter. Is he saying that he is resisting the new clause because the first of the powers sought is covered in other legislation? If so, what valid reason has he for not putting that aspect of the new clause into the Bill? Why can he not do that?

Mr. Forsyth: We do not as a matter of practice put into legislation that which we already have powers to secure. The new clause would require the Secretary of State to ensure that the inspectorate inspected in further education colleges the provisions for students with learning difficulties. The means already exist whereby the Secretary of State can require those functions to be carried out, and I think it is an unfair attack on the inspectorate to suggest that it would not carry out those functions unless they were written into statute. The inspectorate is perfectly capable of assessing the provision for children and students with learning difficulties in schools and colleges of further education in Scotland.

I have already given the hon. Member for Moray an undertaking that I will discuss this issue with the chief

[Mr. Forsyth]

inspector and will ensure that the sentiments expressed in support of the new clause are dealt with. That is why it is not necessary to include this new clause in the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 16, 21, 22, 28, 83, 29 and 48 fulfil——

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill) *rose*——

Mr. Forsyth: May I just deal with the amendments and then I shall come back to the hon. Lady.

The amendments fulfil commitments that I gave in Committee to strengthen the provisions of the Bill which deal with students with learning difficulties. The Bill places a requirement on the Secretary of State to have regard to the requirements of persons over school age who have learning difficulties in exercising his duty to secure adequate and efficient provision of further education in Scotland. I regard that as an important new statutory safeguard.

9.30 pm

Mrs. Fyfe: I hope that the Minister will not interpret our concerns as an attack on the inspectorate. We are expressing genuine concern. It may be helpful if I tell the Minister that I worked in FE in Glasgow for 11 years, and although inspectors came and gave my department good reports, I do not remember questions about the needs of disabled students ever being asked. I do not blame the inspectors. I am sure that they must have had a lot of pressures on them, and I am taking account of that. Nevertheless, my personal experience does not bear out the Minister's confidence in that respect. I am glad that he is undertaking to check with the chief inspector, but I hope that he will adopt a more helpful attitude to what Opposition Members are saying.

Mr. Forsyth: I take that as something of an attack on the local authority responsible for the administration of the colleges concerned. The hon. Lady must not misquote me in the way that the hon. Member for Moray misquoted Burns. I said that to suggest, as did the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West, that the only way of making sure our aim was achieved was to include a requirement in the Bill was something of an attack on the inspectorate. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not mean to put it in those terms. Perhaps we can agree that the principles that the hon. Member for Moray sought to uphold can be secured by the administrative means that I suggested.

Amendment No. 28 will ensure that, where the Secretary of State has made regulations under clause 21 requiring boards of management to publish information about the education provision made, or proposed to be made, for students of the college, that includes students with learning difficulties. I attach importance to appropriate provision being made in FE colleges for students with learning difficulties. I believe that requiring colleges to publish such information will be an important factor in maintaining quality and in concentrating minds on the provision made for those with learning difficulties.

Amendment No. 29 seeks to ensure that the Secretary of State's power by regulations to require boards of management to publish information extends to such information as may be prescribed as to the facilities provided, or to be provided, for students with learning difficulties. Although it will be for each board of management to decide what special facilities are appropriate for their students and staff, information on the facilities that each college provides should be freely available.

Other amendments are textual, or improve the drafting of the Bill.

I said that some of the points that we discussed in Committee would best be dealt with by guidance circulars. I am still of the view that those should also cover matters such as how boards might call on expert advice—through committees, with non-board members or otherwise.

I hope that the House will recognise that we have listened to the debate in Committee, and to the debate tonight, which has re-emphasised the same points. On that basis, I hope that the hon. Member for Moray will feel able to withdraw her new clause and support the Government amendments.

Mrs. Ewing: The Minister has put the Opposition in a difficult position tonight. We would not have tabled the new clause had we felt that existing legislation was adequate. If the Minister says that existing education provision is adequate, why is he so afraid to write on the face of the Bill a simple new clause, which would take care not only of the anxieties of the hon. Members who have spoken, but of those of other organisations such as the Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped, which has asked that this simple straightforward new clause be incorporated in the Bill?

The Minister's response to questions by my hon. Friends and myself, and by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), who is also an expert on the subject, was wrong-footed. He could not tell us how many reports have been lodged on the specific issues that we have raised, and he said that he would forward information to us at an appropriate stage.

However, we all know that once the Bill leaves the Chamber tonight it will quickly go to another place, because the Government want it on the statute book before the general election. That gives no time whatever for the other place to consider in detail the issues that we have debated tonight, and the Minister has not given us a concrete reason for not pressing the clause to a vote.

Is the Minister prepared to give us a time scale in which he will join me and other interested Members in meeting the inspectorate to discuss the matter in detail and introduce an appropriate amendment in the other place? If not, I am afraid that we shall have to press the matter to a vote. I do not think that any of us really wants to do that, but we do want an assurance that our concerns for youngsters with learning difficulties in our colleges of education, and for the inspectorate, which has to deal with the problem, will be taken into consideration and all the positive arguments that I have advanced on behalf of the inspectorate—not against it, as the Minister tried to imply—will be met. We want some assurance right now or we shall press the clause. I give the Minister an opportunity to respond.

Mr. Tom Clarke *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has already spoken. Does he have the leave of the House to speak again?

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr. Clarke: With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker.

We are dealing with an extremely serious matter, on which the Minister failed to satisfy the House in his response. He said that he would be getting advice, and I fully understand that, but, as the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) said, civil servants advise and Ministers decide. If the Minister is deciding simply to sweep the matter under the carpet, it is simply not acceptable.

The simple question is whether we accept that people over the age of 18 with disabilities find that, in the very nature of things, it takes longer for them to communicate and to follow particular courses, and that financial problems often result.

The Minister and I disagree on the debates in the other place and on the attitude to the English Bill. In the past few minutes, I have re-read the proceedings in the other place —I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I shall not read them out —which confirm what I have said rather than what the Minister has said. Far from the hon. Gentleman's advice being accurate, local authorities already have discretion in some cases to decide whether to waive fees.

All we ask for Scotland is that the Minister should consider whether he can agree that, in the case of students up to the age of 25, no fee will be charged. The House had expected some concession from him. We have had none whatever, and unless he returns to the Dispatch Box with a much firmer undertaking, I shall certainly urge my hon. Friends to divide the House.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 131, Noes 248.

Division No. 72] **[9.37 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Bellotti, David
Benton, Joseph
Blunkett, David
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Robinson, Geoffrey
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dick Douglas and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Colvin, Michael
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.

Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Speaker: We now come to new clause 21.

Mr. Worthington: Not moved.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There has been a misunderstanding about new clause 21, which some of us wish to ask questions about.

Mr. Speaker: If the Front-Bench spokesman does not move it, it is not moved.

Mrs. Fyfe: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) inadvertently withdrew new clause 21.

Mr. Worthington: It might have been a misunderstanding.

Mr. Speaker: It might have been, but, unhappily, we have moved on now. We cannot go back.

Clause 1

DUTY OF SECRETARY OF STATE TO SECURE PROVISION OF FURTHER EDUCATION

Amendment made: No. 61 in page 2, line 4, at end add—

'( ) The Secretary of State shall, as soon as is practicable after the end of each calendar year, prepare a report as to the discharge of his duties under this Part of this Act; and he shall lay a copy of each such report before each House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 6

FURTHER EDUCATION TO WHICH SECTION 1 APPLIES

Amendment made: No. 16, in page 4, line 9, leave out from 'difficulty' to end of line 10.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 4, line 11, at end insert—

'( ) is designed to assist persons whose first language is not English to achieve any level of competence in English language;'.

The amendment meets an undertaking given to the Committee. It will place within the Secretary of State's duty for further education a provision that is designed to assist those whose first language is not English and who need to improve their competency in English. This will be of particular benefit in meeting the needs of ethnic minorities and will enable them to play a full part in the economic and social life of our community.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: We now come to amendment No. 65, with which it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 18, and 23 to 25.

Mr. Worthington: Amendment No. 65 is subsumed in later Government proposals. I therefore do not wish to move the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 18, in page 4, line 16, at end insert—

'( ) An order shall not be made under subsection (2) above unless the Secretary of State has consulted—

(a) such persons or organisations appearing to him to be representative of boards of management and education authorities; and

(b) such other persons,

as appear to him to be appropriate as to the amendments proposed to be made by the order.'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 7

FIRST TRANSFER OF COLLEGES

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I beg to move amendment No. 19, in page 4, line 36, at end insert—

'( ) Nothing in subsection (3) above shall require the disclosure of any information in contravention of any provision contained in any enactment (including an enactment contained in a subordinate instrument) restricting or prohibiting the disclosure of such information.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 60.

Mr. Forsyth: The amendment meets an undertaking given to the Committee. It makes clear, by express qualification, that the requirement on education authorities to provide information to boards of management does not overrule other statutory provisions that prohibit or restrict such disclosure. I fully understand the sensitivity of, for example, records of needs where disclosure is restricted by section 60(4) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and by the Education (Record of Needs) Regulations 1982.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: As the hon. Member who tabled amendment No. 60 and raised the issue in Committee, I am most grateful to the Minister for taking my concerns on board. It has been a simple move to include further education colleges in the provision of the Education (Record of Needs) Regulations 1982 and I am sure that it will be appreciated by all concerned, including the organisations that work with people with special needs. I therefore welcome the move.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 8

BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT

Amendments made: No. 20, in page 5, line 14, after 'nature' insert

'(including waiving or granting remission of fees)'

No. 21, in page 5, line 24, leave out 'disabled students and staff' and insert

'students who have learning difficulties and disabled staff'.

No. 22, in page 6, line 10, leave out from 'difficulties' to end of line 11.

No. 23, in page 6, line 32, at end insert—

'( ) An order shall not be made under subsection (8) above unless the Secretary of State has consulted such persons or organisations appearing to him to be representative of boards of management and such other persons as appear to him to be appropriate as to the amendments proposed to be made by the order.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 11

TRANSFER OF STAFF

Amendment made: No. 24, in page 8, line 32, at end insert—

'( ) Where the Secretary of State proposes to make a direction in terms of subsection (2) above he shall consult—

(a) in the case of a direction designating a person, that person; and

(b) in the case of a direction designating a class or description of persons, such persons as appear to the Secretary of State to be representative of the class or description of persons,

as to the proposed designation.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 13

SURPLUSES AND DEFICITS

Amendment made: No. 25, in page 11, line 41, at end insert—

'( ) Before making a direction under subsection (1) above as to the date by which an education authority and a board of management are to arrive at a written agreement, the Secretary of State shall consult the education authority and the board of management.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 14

DISPOSAL OF CERTAIN PROPERTY

Amendment made: No. 26, in page 12, line 46, after first 'of' insert 'or any consideration for'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 18

MISMANAGEMENT BY BOARDS

Amendment made: No. 27, in page 14, line 34, leave out from 'of' to second 'this' in line 35 and insert

'sub-paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of paragraph 3(2) of Schedule 1 to'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 21

INFORMATION AS TO PROVISION OF FURTHER EDUCATION

Amendments made: No. 28, in page 16, line 30, at end insert

'(including students with learning difficulties).'

No. 83, in page 16, line 33, leave out 'and'.

No. 29, in page 16, line 34, at end insert

'and

( ) the facilities provided or proposed to be provided for students of the college who have learning difficulties and disabled staff of the college.'.

No. 30, in page 16, line 45, at end insert

'without the prior consent, given in writing, of such student'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 22

CONTROL OF DISPOSAL OF CERTAIN LAND ETC.

Amendments made: No. 31, in page 17, line 4, leave out 'or any interest in land'.

No. 32, in page 17, line 18, leave out 'or interest in land'.

No. 33, in page 17, line 22, leave out 'or interest in land'—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Clause 25

DISPOSALS AND CONTRACTS WITHOUT CONSENT

Amendments made: No. 34, in page 19, line 7, leave out 'or interest in land'.

No. 35, in page 19, line 10, leave out 'or interest in land'.

No. 36, in page 19, line 12, leave out

'or an interest in land'.

No. 37, in page 19, line 36, leave out

'or an interest in land'.

No. 38, in page 19, line 41, after 'acquisition', insert 'of land'.

No. 39, in page 19, line 41, leave out from 'section' to 'the' in line 42.

No. 40, in page 20, line 1, leave out

'or an interest in land'.

No. 41, in page 20, line 15, leave out

'or an interest in land'.—*[Mr. Lang]*

Clause 26

RECOVERY OF LOSS AND DAMAGES.

Amendments made: No. 42, in page 20, line 31, leave out '"or interest in land'.

No. 43, in page 20, line 34, leave out 'or interest in land'.

No. 44, in page 20, line 35, leave out 'or interest in land'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 28

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS AS REGARDS COLLEGE COUNCILS

Amendment made: No. 45, in page 22, line 23, leave out from 'from' to end of the line and insert

'the date prescribed in pursuance of subsection (3) above'. —*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 30

INTERPRETATION OF PART I

Amendments made: No. 46, in page 23, line 35, leave out 'or any interest in land'.

No. 47, in page 23, line 43, at end insert—

'"land" includes, without prejudice to the meaning given to it by Schedule 1 to the Interpretation Act 1978, an interest in land within the meaning of this section.'.

No. 48, in page 23, line 43, at end insert—

'( ) Any reference in this Part of this Act to a person who has a learning difficulty shall be construed in accordance with section 1(4) of this Act.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 33

ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY INSTITUTIONS

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 25, line 7, after 'shall' insert

'after consultation with such organisations as appear to the Council to be representative of institutions within the higher education sector'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 79, in page 25, line 16, at end insert

'and in performing their functions under this subsection the Council shall have regard to such provision as is made as regards the assessment of the quality of education provided in institutions within the higher education sector in England and Wales in pursuance of section 68(1)(a) of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (assessment of the quality of education provided by institutions in England and Wales).'. —*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Mr. Speaker: With this, we will take Government amendments 3 to 5.

Mr. Worthington: We particularly welcome Government amendment No. 3. We stress the importance of the quality assessment committee having an element of independence, and the proposal that at least half the members of the quality assessment committee should not be on the funding council meets our requirements. Therefore, we thank the Government for their amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Dalyell: I beg to move amendment No. 87, in line 16 at end insert—

'(c) establish a further committee, to be known as the "Medical Standards Committtee", with the function of giving them advice on the quality of medical education and research.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 88, in line 16 at end insert—

'(3) The Medical Standards Committee shall liaise as appropriate with equivalent bodies in England and Wales, with a view to ensuring the uniformity of medical standards throughout the United Kingdom.'.

Mr. Dalyell: The case is most succinctly put by the dean of the faculty of medicine in the university of Edinburgh.

It being Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill and the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), again considered.

Mr. Dalyell: As the amendment is important from the view of medical and other scientific professions in Scotland —*[Interruption.]* It is difficult to speak when people are making such as noise.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members below the Gangway either come into the Chamber and listen to the debate or carry on their conversations outside?

Mr. Dalyell: The view of the dean of the faculty of medicine, who speaks with the full authority of the other medical professors in the university of Edinburgh and has had contact with those in Glasgow and elsewhere, was that he regarded

"the establishment of a National Joint Council for Medicine and Dentistry as being particularly important. There are obvious reasons why these subjects need to be distinguished in this way . . . there is a statutory limit to the number of medical and dental students, unlike the free market situation that is developing for the numbers of other students. Hence the University cannot augment its income in relation to medicine or dentistry by increasing the student intake. This of course means that medicine and dentistry will become increasingly expensive when expressed in terms of income per full time equivalent number of staff. Without national recognition and protection our medical schools will suffer savage staff losses. That is, of course, happening here in Edinburgh where we are being asked to lose 83 posts despite being at exactly the average cost for United Kingdom medical schools."

The dean asks the House to appreciate

"the key relationship of the medical and dental professions with the National Health Service."

He states:

"That is vitually a monopoly employer and hence there has to be a relationship between the number of doctors employed in the NHS and the output of the medical schools. Again this is best done on a UK basis rather than a Scottish one."

That is one reason for the amendment.

According to Edinburgh university, we should not be training doctors and dentists just for Scotland. The dean states:

"To do so would not only mean a drastic reduction in output but would destroy our role as one of the major medical schools in the UK."

He also argues that we must consider how to maintain national standards. The General Medical Council plays the key role, as does the General Dental Council—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) has a distinguished medical school within his constituency, at Southampton university. I would have hoped that he would support us.

The letter continues:

> "Currently the Education Committee of the GMC is suggesting major changes in the curriculum. The GMC has recently carried out a national review of the final professional examination. All these endeavours are designed to maintain the UK's role as a centre of excellence for medical education and to allow confidence in the uniformity of qualification standards. In this context it makes considerable sense that there should be a National Joint Council for Medicine and Dentistry which could then act as a bridge between the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and one for England and Wales. It would then be complementary to UK-wide organisations such as the GMC."

That is the considered view of the dean. Because of the importance of the subject, I thought that it was only sensible to bring it to the attention of the Scottish Office.

I have just received a letter from the Minister; for the sake of coherence, I should like to outline it to the House, because I wish to reply to it in the hope that the Government will make a further response. The Minister acknowledges the letter from Professor Christopher Edwards. Following a conversation which took place at the House, he says that he has had a chance to study amendment No. 87 in the light of the concern which I expressed in Committee about maintaining United Kingdom links. He says:

> "Unfortunately, I think amendment No. 87 would be a step in the wrong direction, as it simply requires the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council to set up a Scottish Medical Committee. What we want is a joint, UK medical committee, and I shall be glad to give you an assurance in the House that the Government will require the three funding councils to take action and set one up."

Fortuitously, the Secretary of State for Education and Science is present. I hope that he will spring to his feet and agree to that. He was referred to in Committee at length in terms of his D. H. Lawrence attitude. Here is his chance to contribute to Scottish proceedings.

There is real concern about medical standards. It is probably a United Kingdom rather than a Scottish matter, as the Minister's letter suggests, but it is important that, in the English Bill or from the Secretary of State for Education and Science tonight, we get an undertaking. I cannot think of any other reason why the right hon. and learned Gentleman should so courteously have come to the House to take part in our debates. *[Interruption.]* Sotto voce the Secretary of State says something. If he had spoken a little louder, we would have heard what he said.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I have been drawn here by the eloquence of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dalyell: I had better complete the picture. The Minister says in his letter that the procedure was adopted with the Universities Funding Council in 1988 and he sees no reason why it should not produce the desired effect now. He hopes that that meets my concern, but it does not completely meet my concern. I should like to know in concrete terms what the Department has in mind to insert in legislation.

In Committee, among the many letters which I offered to my colleagues was one from Lord Wilberforce. The Appeal Court judge of many years reminded us that what Ministers or any of the rest of us said in Standing Committee or on the Floor of the House mattered not at all when it came to the courts interpreting legislation. That is why it is so important and why I asked for a concrete undertaking about what will be introduced in legislation on the subject. I leave it at that.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for reading out my letter, which I gave him this afternoon. That obviates the necessity for me to repeat the points in it. The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the importance of a co-ordinated approach and of the three funding councils operating with a joint medical committee. I do not know what I can say to the hon. Gentleman to persuade him that it is not necessary to put this on the face of the Bill to ensure that it is delivered, but I can give him an undertaking—in concrete, stone or any material of his choosing—that the Government will ensure that the funding councils take note of the views expressed in this House, and will ensure that there is co-ordination between the three funding councils in the form of a joint medical committee.

This will meet the reasonable expectations of those who have argued in favour of the importance of this idea. I do not underestimate it: I simply take issue with what the hon. Member for Linlithgow said at the end of his speech—that this matter must be written into the legislation, and that it is a matter for the courts. It is not. It relates to the relationship between the Secretaries of State in the territorial areas and their respective funding councils.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will feel able to withdraw the amendment and will take comfort from having secured a far stronger undertaking than he was given in Committee. His persistence in advancing this view has scored something of a victory.

Mr. Dalyell: I am always prepared to accept assurances that doubtless are given in good faith, so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 3, in page 25, line 17 after 'be', insert—

'(a) persons who are not members of the Council; and

(b) '.

No. 4, in page 25, line 19, at end insert—

'and in appointing such persons the Council shall have regard to the desirability of their being currently engaged in the provision of such higher education or in carrying responsibility for such provision.'.

No. 5, in page 25, line 20, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3) A committee established under this section shall be treated as if it were a committee established under paragraph 8 of Schedule 6 to this Act.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 36

GRANTS

Amendment proposed: No. 6, in page 27, line 9, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

> **'(2) The terms and conditions referred to in subsection (1) above shall not be expressed so as to affect the provision of financial support by the Council in respect of activities carried on by any particular institution.**
>
> **(2A) Such terms and conditions may, in particular, impose requirements to be complied with by all institutions or all institutions falling within such class or description of institutions as is specified in the terms and conditions and, notwithstanding subsection (2) above, may be such as to require that, before financial support of any amount or description or any part of such financial support so specified is provided by the Council in respect of activities carried on by any particular institution, the institution shall have complied with such requirements.'.**
> —*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Mr. Worthington: I beg to move, as an amendment to the proposed amendment, amendment (a), leave out subsection (2A).

As the Minister will know, this clause and clause 4[illegible] have a great deal of history behind them, constituting what Lord Simon of Glaisdale called a double-barrelled gun. We are discussing the importance of academic freedom, the conditions under which grants can be given and the directions that can be given to institutions or the funding council.

We all agree that a strong element of accountability is necessary in the spending of public money and that some conditions need to be laid down by the Secretary of State. We have just discussed medical students and medical schools, and we should certainly know how many people are training to be doctors. Similarly, however, there needs to be a hands-off approach by the Government so as to secure academic freedom.

The Minister kindly agreed to have another look at clause 36. Inevitably, we compare the Scottish legislation with that for England and Wales, and we find that part of what the Government propose is acceptable. Hon. Members on both sides are determined that the Government should not be able to issue instructions that affect the financial support for one particular institution. That would be interference. We set up the funding council to prevent that.

In subsection (2), proposed in amendment No. 6, the Government have honoured that obligation and in general subsection (2) has no problems for us. Unfortunately, the proposed subsection (2A) brings in difficulties to which I shall address myself. The first difficulty is that some institutions could be in a class of one; an institution in Scotland could be unique. I mention, for example, the school of architecture in Scotland. There is only one and I mention that because the Secretary of State for Education and Science said that the Government would not want a school of architecture to lengthen its degrees to seven years. The school of architecture would be in a class of its own, and, according to the proposed subsection (2A), it would be legitimate for the Secretary of State for Scotland to intervene.

10.15 pm

The second and more substantial objection is that amendment No. 6 uses the words "notwithstanding subsection (2) above". It seems that the Secretary of State, if it suited him, could ignore subsection (2). It would be possible for the Secretary of State to lay down a condition that would affect individual institutions. That is why we propose that subsection (2A) should be withdrawn.

However, that is not our final position, and there is still some distance to go on the issue. As the Minister will know, in the other place, Lord Beloff moved an amendment, which was accepted, which said:

> "such terms and conditions may not be framed by reference to particular courses of study or programmes of research including the contents of such courses or programmes and the manner in which they are taught, supervised or assesed, or to the criteria for the selection and appointment of academic staff and for the admission of students."

We are gradually on our way to the solution here. The Opposition object to the words "notwithstanding subsection (2)", because they seem to invalidate subsection (2), in which the Government have said that financial support cannot be interfered with to affect any particular institution.

Lord Beloff's proposition in the other place was valuable, because it clearly said that there were areas of academic freedom in which one must not interfere. In the spirit of the Government and the Opposition looking for a formula, I ask the Minister to respond.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I advise the House that amendment (a) should not be made.

There is not a great deal of difference between the Government and the Opposition on the matter. Amendment No. 6 fulfils my commitment in Committee to redraft clause 36(2) to make it clear that institutions' specific conditions on grant are not permitted. The amendment achieves that admirably and I hope there will be less confusion about the Government's policy in the area from now on. I will spell it out. The Secretary of State's powers to attach terms and conditions to his grant to the council have not been, are not and will not be capable of allowing for institution-specific conditions.

The wording in subsection (2A) is necessary to ensure that the general terms and conditions that the Secretary of State may impose are capable of taking effect. The hon. Gentleman is concerned about that wording, and his amendment seeks to remove it. We need the wording to ensure that institutions that comply with the general conditions benefit, and that those that do not comply do not benefit—*[Interruption.]* I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is following this. I am sure that the conversations taking place are to the benefit of us all, but he should be clear on this matter because it is a difficult point. It is a matter of legal wording, and I spent some time considering it.

I shall repeat what I said. We need the wording in subsection (2A) to ensure that institutions that comply with the general conditions benefit, and that those that do not comply do not benefit. For that reason, I cannot accept amendment (a), as it would prevent the powers from being used effectively in practice.

I told the Committee that I had discussed these matters with Professor Forty, the chairman of the Committee of Scottish University Principals. I am glad to report to the House that he regards our amendment as a significant and helpful clarification of the Government's policy in this area, which he considers establishes an appropriate framework for the relationship between the Government, the funding council and the institutions.

The hon. Gentleman has fulfilled his purpose; I am grateful to him for the constructive way in which he approached this matter and for his helpful suggestions. We now have a form of wording that meets what the Committee required.

Mr. Dalyell: Can we take it that the Minister is speaking on behalf of all the seven other Scottish vice-chancellors, and that there are no reservations among any of them? That is correct, is it not?

Mr. Forsyth: I do not think that I could speak for the principal of Stirling university in his capacity as chairman of the Committee of Scottish University Principals. What I told the Committee was that I would consult him. I met him, and he tried to help to frame a form of wording that would meet the anxieties expressed by his colleagues. I think that he would be cross with me if I were to suggest that he was necessarily speaking for all of them. To be able to speak for all the university principals on any issue would be quite an undertaking.

Mr. Stephen: The Minister chose his words carefully in describing the chairman's view. Does he believe that the chairman approves of the wording in the amendment and that all his concerns are satisfied? The Minister said that the chairman thought that the wording made a useful contribution—or words to that effect. We should be clear whether he is or is not satisfied with the amendment.

As a lawyer, my view is that subsection (2A) is very difficult, verging on the incomprehensible, and certainly would not get a plain English award. Parliamentary drafting is at its best when it is simple, lucid and clear, and this subsection certainly is not. From what can be discerned about the wording, the phrase "notwithstanding subsection (2)" tends to suggest that it could apply to a single institution. As subsection (2) is about ensuring that the terms and conditions cannot be applied to specific institutions, the amendment fails the very test that the Minister set himself in Committee.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not wish to become involved in an argument about the quality of the drafting. I accept the hon. Gentleman's complaints about the difficulty of the wording. At the time when the Committee was seeking to change the wording, I was advised that the process would be rather difficult and clumsy. I agree that the wording is not—I was going to say crystal clear, but that would have implied that it was not clear. I am advised that the meaning is clear, although I accept that it needs to be read carefully.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) seemed to feel that the words "notwithstanding subsection (2)" would allow the Secretary of State to ignore the subsection. They do not mean that; they mean that the Secretary of State can impose general conditions that impact at institutional level. The hon. Gentleman asked about the position regarding the university principal, John Forty. I understand that he has told the Department that he thinks that his colleagues would find the provision acceptable, and that he is happy with the wording as it stands.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about classes of one. Classes of one are possible, but, if the Secretary of State knew in advance that a class had only one member, he would fall foul of subsection (2) and the ban on institutions' specific conditions. If, however, a general condition in the event proved to apply to only one institution, that would be allowed.

I am sure that that is very clear to the hon. Gentleman. I can only say that it was the Committee that asked us to deliver; we have delivered, and I hope that its members will not complain. I believe that we have a measure that should satisfy the Committee and the university principals, and, more important, provide a basis for future funding that will command consensus support.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not think that hon. Members should lightly try to advise those in the other place. I trust, however, that I will be permitted a reaction which I hope will not be in any way offensive. I hope that the measure will be subjected to the eagle eye of Lord Wilberforce and his colleagues the Law Lords, and that they will scrutinise it carefully. It is obviously a pitch for the lawyers in the other place, and I hope that the Minister's words pass the test.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I express my appreciation to the Minister, who has at least attempted to make clear in the legislation that which the Committee sought. I make no complaint—I am not carping—when I say that the Government amendments are far from clear to me, and I am not sure that they are clear to anyone. The principle of what we are trying to achieve, however, is entirely clear. It has not been possible for me to consult the principal of the university of Aberdeen to find out whether he is satisfied with the amendment, but I suspect that, even if I had been able to do so, he might not have been able to give us categorical advice.

In Committee, the Minister said that it would be difficult to draft an amendment to make clear the issues about which we were concerned—academic freedom, for instance. I think that he has made it clear that he accepts the principle. Although we have not had much time between Committee and Report, I hope that the Minister will assure us that, between now and discussion of the Bill in the other place, the Government will look closely at the provision with the parliamentary draftsmen and that, if any tidying up proves necessary, it will be done. I should be content with that.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Of course I give that assurance to the hon. Gentleman.

10.30 pm

Mr. Worthington: I think that we are making good progress on this issue. One of the advantages of accepting that both the Minister and Opposition Members are still looking for a solution is that we could clarify the attitude of the vice-chancellors. There is ambivalence about this issue. I know that the Minister met Professor Forty to discuss it and I accept the Minister's assurance about what Professor Forty said. I know, too, that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals at national level is not happy about the proposal and feels that it needs to be looked at again.

[Mr. Worthington]

If the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen) can read this and impose upon it the same reservations, as a lawyer, that I have, it is clearly open to misinterpretation. We do not even have to take into account the credibility of the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside as a lawyer. The test of the clause is whether it can be understood. We have heard doubts expressed about whether it can be reasonably well understood.

I accept the Minister's assurance about a class with only one pupil. He made a valuable point. I still think that there would be value in looking at the amendment that was accepted, although against the Government's wishes, in the other place—about it being made absolutely clear that the terms and conditions that are applied to grants cannot be framed by reference to particular courses of study, or by reference to particular programmes of research, and that they cannot be about the criteria for the selection and appointment of academic staff or for the admission of students. Those are valuable additions to the clause in order to make it absolutely clear that what the Government and Opposition are attempting to do is to make it clear that conditions that interfere with academic freedom cannot be imposed.

On the basis of people not being backed into corners, of not being confrontational and of still looking for an improvement to the wording, I am willing to withdraw the amendment. We do not say that the Government's amendment is the best solution. We accept the Minister's assurance that they have taken steps forward but that they will see whether they can take further steps forward by introducing absolutely clear-cut wording into the clause. On that basis, I beg leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment to the proposed amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment No. 6 agreed to.

Clause 37

FURTHER FUNCTIONS

Amendment made: No. 7, in page 28, line 11, at end insert—

'( ) The Secretary of State shall not make an order under subsection (5) above unless he has consulted—

(a) the Council; and

(b) such organisations as appear to him to be representative of institutions within the higher education sector.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 41

CLOSURE OF INSTITUTIONS

Amendment made: No. 8, in page 30, line 43, at end insert—

'( ) An order under subsection (1) above shall not be made unless the Secretary of State has consulted—

(a) the Council; and

(b) the governing body of the institution proposed to be closed.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 39

POWER OF PRIVY COUNCIL IN RELATION TO DESIGNATED INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Dalyell: I beg to move amendment No. 89, in page 29, line 4, leave out from "functions" to end of line 7.

This is a probing amendment. Like all probing amendments, it can be elastic. My first point relates to the central issue of money, and it is to ask the Minister what he would have said in response to new clause 21, about superannuation entitlements. I hope that that does not stretch the House's patience too far. We know what happened a few minutes ago—there was a mistake—and this is an important subject.

The purpose of the probing amendment is to ask what the Government's attitude is to academic endowments. I couple it succinctly with a strong personal feeling that in this country we do not take advantage of potential endowments as happens in the United States and, perhaps above all, in Israel. Anyone who has been to the Hebrew university in Jerusalem will have seen many faculties endowed by people whose names have been preserved——

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Langbaurgh): Hear, hear.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend is a scientist who has travelled widely, and he knows exactly what I am talking about.

Some universities abroad attract a great deal of money through named bequests. It is an understandable trait of human nature that people often like their names and those of their wives or others to be remembered, and they give a great deal of money to that end. We have lost in the past 20 or 30 years by not tapping that source of money.

Earlier, we discussed the chair of Scottish history and the Fraser endowment. Incidentally, I think that the Fraser endowment moneys have not been managed as wonderfully on the stock market as they might have been, but that is bye the bye. However, the important fact is that they were endowed in the first place, and that is how many such chairs occurred. In such circumstances, I feel entitled to ask what the Government's attitude is to academic endowment. It would be a great courtesy if they would tell us in answer to the issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and our colleagues raised on the subject of superannuation entitlements, producing the new clause which read:

'—. The Secretary of State shall ensure that provision is made for staff of institutions newly designated as universities to have superannuation entitlements which are no less favourable than those applicable to staff in established universities.'.

It would be a courtesy to the House if the Minister could respond to that.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Perhaps I can help the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) in so [illegible] as this matter is concerned with money. I suppose that new clause 21 was also concerned with money, so that there is a clear link between the two. I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your tolerance, but I know from experience in Committee that the hon. Gentleman will find a way to pursue the matter, so I am happy to respond.

The key point in relation to academic staff and pension provision is that the main benefits which are payable by the two schemes are broadly the same, which is one eightieth of pension salary index linked for each year of reckonable service up to a maximum of forty eightieths at normal retiring age and a lump sum payment of three times annual pension. Therefore, conferring a right on individuals to transfer between them is of little value. In fact, the level of employee contribution in the university scheme, at 6·35 per cent., is marginally higher than that in the teachers' scheme at 6 per cent.

What I would have said in respect of new clause 21 is that it is wrong-headed because pensions are essentially a benefit which flows from employment and it is employers rather than individual employees who must decide which scheme to provide. It would also involve considerable extra financial burdens for employers, money which the Government believe should be spent on the provision of higher education.

On amendment No. 89, subsection (2)(c) is not a new provision. It is lifted directly from section 77 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and was inserted into that Act by the Education (Scotland) Act 1981. The reason for the provision was that the Secretary of State's powers to reorganise educational endowments which were contained in part VI of the 1980 Act were being handed to education authorities, at least in respect of locally funded education.

The powers relating to grant-aided colleges were retained and transferred to the section of the 1980 Act dealing with the government of these colleges. It might interest the House to know that the Secretary of State's powers in part VI of the 1980 Act were simply carried over from the Education (Scotland) Act 1962. Therefore, the Secretary of State has had the powers to deal with endowments for at least 30 years.

The provision in clause 39 allows a simple means of amending endowments to reflect changes to the institutions to which they relate. For instance, if at present a grant-aided college, or, in future, a designated institution, were to change its name or merge with another institution, the appropriate change could be made to any endowments related to the college or institution.

So clause 39 simply transfers to the Privy Council the Secretary of State's existing powers in that area. We have made no changes to the provisions relating to endowments, in keeping with the spirit of the higher education White Paper, which was that existing and successful arrangements for the colleges should broadly remain as they are.

By way of summary, let me say that the answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow is that there is no change in the Government's policy on the matter.

Mr. Dalyell: That was as helpful a reply as the Minister could have given. I think that the Department should discuss the matter with the Treasury, and reflect how endowments for hard-pressed institutions such as the University of Edinburgh could be encouraged. In that spirit, unless any of my colleagues wishes to speak, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 80, in page 29, line 10, after 'above', insert

'if neither the institution nor the governing body is, immediately before the order is made, a body corporate.'.
—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 41

CLOSURE OF INSTITUTIONS

Amendment made: No. 8, in page 30, line 43, at end insert—

'( ) An order under subsection (1) above shall not be made unless the Secretary of State has consulted—
(a) the Council; and
((b)) the governing body of the institution proposed to be closed.'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Clause 42

POWER TO AWARD DEGREES, ETC.

Amendment made: No. 81, in page 31, line 5, leave out 'Secretary of State' and insert 'Privy Council'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Clause 48

DIRECTIONS

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 33, line 29, after 'directions' insert

'under this section, and such directions shall be'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may take the following amendments: No. 86, in page 33, line 29, at end add

', provided that these directions have previously been approved by the Committee of Scottish Vice-Chancellors.'.

Government amendment No. 10, in page 33, line 29, at end insert—

'( ) The Secretary of State may give general directions to the Council about the exercise of their functions.

( ) If it appears to the Secretary of State—
(a) that the financial affairs of any institution within the higher education sector have been or are being mismanaged; or
(b) that, in consequence of matters outwith the control of such an institution, it is likely that the financial position of the institution will be significantly adversely affected,

he may, after consulting the Council and the institution, give such directions to the Council about the provision of financial support in respect of the activities carried on by the institution as he considers are necessary or expedient by reason of the mismanagement or, as the case may be, adverse effect on the institution's financial position.'.

Amendment (a) to the proposed amendment, in line 6, leave out from 'mismanaged' to end of line 8.

Amendment (b) to the proposed amendment, leave out subsection (b).

Amendment (c) to the proposed amendment, in line 15, leave out from 'mismanagement' to end of line 13.

Mr. Forsyth: Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 arose out of undertakings that I gave in Committee to take clause 48 away and to bring forward amendments which would do two things. First, they would make it clear that the power extends to institution-specific directions. Secondly, they would restrict directions to financial matters. Amendment No. 10 goes rather further than this, since it allows the Secretary of State to make an institution-specific direction only where it appears to him that there has been mismanagement of the financial affairs of the institution, or where the institution's financial position has been significantly adversely affected for some other reason. In addition, the directions may relate only to the provision of

[Mr. Forsyth]

financial support by the council to the institution, and they must arise out of the financial difficulties suffered by institutions, and not from any other source.

I believe that the amendments provide a firm basis on which to develop a constructive relationship between the Government, the funding council and the higher education institutions in Scotland. The amendments represent a significant restriction of the Secretary of State's powers in this area and follow extensive representations by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). As with conditions on grant, we have discussed the matter with Professor Forty, the chairman of the Scottish Committee of University Principals, and I am pleased to report that he was encouraged by the way in which we proposed to restrict the power. In particular, he saw the reference to financial difficulties arising otherwise than through mismanagement as an acceptable form of potential protection for institutions which may be confronted with funding difficulties through no fault of their own. On that basis, I commend the amendments to the House.

It may be helpful if I remind hon. Members that the Secretary of State's power of direction in relation to higher education funding always has been capable of extending to institution-specific direction. That was true under the Education Reform Act 1988, although that Act did not spell out that institution-specific directions were permitted because the legal advice available to the Government at that time indicated that it was not necessary to do so. It was made abundantly clear, however, during the passage of the Act that the power of direction was intended to be capable of being institution-specific.

Since then, there has, of course, been the court case in England relating to conditions of grant, and the legal advice now available to the Government is that the 1988 Act will no longer do. If we are to continue to have institution-specific powers of direction, we must say so explicitly, and that is what we have done. The policy therefore has not changed, but the legal environment has, and the words that we need to achieve the same effect in legislation have had to change too.

10.45 pm

The power is clause 48 is intended to be used only as a last resort in emergencies after the other available solutions have been found wanting. The power of direction is, in a sense, a form of disaster insurance. We cannot foresee precisely what disasters will hit the higher education system in years to come, I hope that none will, but we need to have some way of dealing with them if they do arise.

Amendment No. 10 allows us to cover both disasters that appear to have arisen because of financial mismanagement and those caused by other factors. The reason for extending the provision beyond financial mismanagement is that it would allow the Government to help where, for instance, a natural disaster had struck an institution and put it out of operation, or if a significant portion of its funds were lost due to the collapse of a deposit-taker. We could all think of examples of that. Mismanagement might not be involved, or it might be difficult to take a reasonable view on whether it was or was not, but action would still be needed. Accordingly, I believe that amendment No. 10 provides a useful degree of protection, which would be removed by amendments (a), (b) and (c).

Mr. Stephen: I understand that an amendment to the English and Welsh Bill was introduced to cover this very matter, but that proposed new paragraph (b) was not included. Why does the Minister feel that a wider power —beyond that to deal with cases of mismanagement—is necessary in the Scottish Bill but not in that governing England and Wales? Or does he expect further changes to be made to that Bill?

Mr. Forsyth: I know that the neighbour of the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen), the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), makes a career of going round Scotland telling everyone that I look at what is happening in England and immediately impose it in Scotland as part of the Government's education policy. It may surprise the hon. Gentleman to know, therefore, that the amendments—as I said in Committee would be the case—have been drafted to suit Scottish circumstances, following discussions with the Scottish representative of the university principals, and they reflect the provisions that we believe are necessary.

I have not studied the English provision, but I think that the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside is referring to the fact that, in the Scottish provision, there is greater freedom for the Secretary of State to intervene in cases where disasters appear to have arisen not solely as a result of financial mismanagement. Let me give an example. All of us are well aware of what happened in the Western Isles following the collapse of BCCI. It is possible that a university will find itself in similar circumstances at some point in the future.

Mr. Stephen: That was mismanagement.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman may argue that it was mismanagement, although I dare say that the convenor of the Western Isles would seek to argue to the contrary. The important point is that the Secretary of State should have the power to intervene immediately, and should not have to send in a team of accountants and professionals to establish whether there were grounds for intervening because mismanagement had arisen. That is why the wider wording is proposed. That seems to me sensible, and we seem to have agreement on it.

I apologise for speaking at length on this matter, but it is one of the key issues in the Bill. I thought that the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside was going to ask why the Secretary of State should need a power of direction in these circumstances—why could he not rely on persuading the council to act? The answer is that, in some circumstances, the council might be unwilling to embark upon the action necessary without the explicit backing of the Secretary of State and Parliament. The council might be in complete agreement about what should be done but might simply feel that the necessary action exceeded the scope of its legitimate authority.

In those circumstances, it would be quite inappropriate to require the consent of the universities, as proposed in amendment No. 86, tabled by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). That amendment relates to all directions to the council, not just to the institution-specific ones. If we are not requiring the council's consent, why do we need that of the universities. What about the rest of the higher education sector? The point is that responsibility to Parliament for the stewardship of public funds rests with the Secretary of State, not the universities, and it is right that responsibility for framing directions and seeking parliamentary authority for them should rest with the Secretary of State, too.

An important point, which I feel is often overlooked here, is that all the Secretary of State's directions must be contained in an order which is subject to parliamentary procedure. The Secretary of State cannot simply write quietly to the council and tell it what to do. He must lay an order before both Houses of Parliament, publish it and expect a debate on it if only one Member of either House objects.

The Secretary of State's powers under clause 48 are hedged around both by the restrictions of parliamentary scrutiny and by the restrictions imposed by amendment No. 10, essentially tying the directions to financial matters. This, I believe, provides an acceptable means of providing the public interest and the funds involved and of safeguarding academic freedom and the autonomy of our higher education institutions.

I am extremely grateful to the hon. Members for Clydebank and Milngavie, for Linlithgow and for Kincardine and Deeside for their contributions in Committee. This has not been an easy matter, but I believe that we now have a form of words that will satisfy the needs of higher education in Scotland and provide the necessary protection to ensure accountability over public funds.

Mr. Worthington: I propose to approach these provisions in the same spirit as I approached clause 36 and to see whether we can advance any further. I welcome the Minister's move broadly to limit the powers of financial mismanagement. That is the main proposal. There is a strong feeling among the members of the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics that clause 48 is not necessary because the Secretary of State has so many other powers, both formal and informal. Clause 48 is predicated upon the premise not only that individual institutions will be financially mismanaged and go off the rails, but that the funding council will go off the rails simultaneously. The accounting officers in both the institution and the funding council have the power to exercise accountability, but there are all sorts of other informal powers, such as the powers of the press and of Parliament. We discussed the affairs of the University of Edinburgh earlier. Such informal power can have a considerable influence. Although I shall not push it, there is a question about whether clause 48 is necessary.

In the spirit of trying to find an answer, Opposition Members share the concern of Government Members about accountability of public money—the two parties may soon change sides in this House. I accept that the Secretary of State should have some powers of intervention if the financial affairs of a higher education institution have been or are being mismanaged. However, there is a difficulty, which we mentioned in Committee, that financial and academic affairs cannot be perfectly disentangled. How does one judge what is financial mismanagement? It can mean that one has a policy of accepting too many students without an adequate income. As I have said, it is not easy to disentangle financial and academic mismanagement. One uses money for a purpose, and that purpose is the policy of the institution. But let us set that aside because we are trying to deal with the issue of financial mismanagement.

The Minister then put a very benign interpretation on new paragraph (b), which states:

"that, in consequence of matters outwith the control of such an institution, it is likely that the financial position of the institution will be significantly adversely affected".

The Minister included some sort of natural disaster. I know that recently my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) went to see the Minister because of asbestos in a school in his constituency. In a sense that is a natural disaster and the Minister might take action to assist. That is benign intervention. It is good that a Minister intervenes to save an institution from asbestos, an earthquake or some other act of God. The phrase

"in consequence of matters outwith the control of such an institution"

does not cover only benign intervention; it covers any action by the Government that would have an impact on the financial position of an institution. It is like the "notwithstanding" provision that we debated on a previous clause. It gives the Government the power to intervene.

In trying to solve these extremely difficult problems it is natural to consider what is happening in the other place and how this matter is being resolved in the English and Welsh Bill. It is striking that there now seems to be agreement. Both Professor Forty and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals are satisfied with the progress being made and that clause 81(3) is about financial mismanagement and not about

"matters outwith the control of such an institution".

Clause 81, the equivalent of clause 48 in this Bill, is no longer an area of contention.

I applaud the Minister for the progress that has been made. There remain difficulties about the ambiguity of the expression:

"in consequence of matters outwith the control of such an institution".

It can have the benign interpretation that the Minister put upon it, but it can also have other connotations. Other hon. Members wish to speak, but that is my reservation.

Mr. Stephen: First, I compliment the Minister on his efforts in this area. He has taken a positive approach to overcoming this problem, which at one time was not the case on the English and Welsh Bill. Clearly, we have made significant progress.

I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and remain worried by the wording of paragraph (b). The Minister mocks me when I refer to the English and Welsh Bill by saying that we should do our own thing in Scotland. Indeed, I welcomed his willingness to take a different tack from that in England and Wales.

The issue concerns academic freedom and this wording infringes it more than does that in the English and Welsh Bill. I believe that the wording for that Bill is exactly the same, except that paragraph (b) is omitted. The Minister may want to correct me on that. Paragraph (b) gives further powers to the Secretary of State. Inevitably, that means a lessening of academic freedom. It has been argued that that is a benevolent reduction, because reserve powers should be given to the Secretary of State so that he can step

[Mr. Stephen]

in in unfortunate, unexpected circumstances. I understand that approach, but the wording of paragraph (b) does not bring into law the aims set down for the Scottish Office.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman has an advantage over me, which may be put right shortly, as he has a copy of the English Bill, which I have not studied. If the hon. Gentleman accepts that the provisions are broader and that the difference arises from the provision in the Scottish Bill, which allows for action in the event of natural disaster, for example, is that not beneficial to Scottish institutions? Why does he want to remove that provision?

11 pm

Mr. Stephen: I accept that there is an advantage in terms of what the civil law in Scotland would regard as force majeure circumstances—the one-off, unexpected situation. I accept what the Minister said about BCCI. However, even though the Law Lords have significantly greater legal expertise than any of us, the wording in Bills can still be confusing to them. Paragraph (b) states:

"in consequence of matters outwith the control of such an institution"—

that is an extremely broad term—

"it is likely that the financial position of the institution will be significantly adversely affected".

Does the Minister believe that those words narrow the terms of the provision to the specific force majeure circumstances to which he referred? I believe that they do not and that is why I am still concerned about the clause.

Mr. Dalyell: I have given an undertaking to my hon. Friend the Member of Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) that I will be quick.

I have had discussions with Michael Hamlyn of Dundee university, and I believe his lawyers. The universities of Dundee and Edinburgh want to know what exactly is meant by mismanagement. It is probably too late to go into legal definitions, but the key issue is in what circumstances the Government feel entitled to "bail out" a university? I am sure that those important questions will be explored by the lawyers in the Lords. Is the Minister prepared to discuss with the University of Dundee, which is extremely worried, exactly what is meant by mismanagement?

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The difficulty that we have had all along is to find a form of words that will provide for the flexibility to deal with the unexpected while reassuring those who are concerned about how that power will be used.

When people have come to see me or have expressed a view about this issue, I have asked them whether they would like to set down their ideas about what those words should be. I have had very few takers. Many people have described what the parameters of the provision might be, but they have then said, "Well, you are the Minister. You have the draftsmen, you produce it." This is our best effort, looking at all the foreseeable circumstances.

The hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen) is right in believing that there are differences from the English provisions. The objective has been the same, but we have tried to protect the interests of the institutions in Scotland to the best of our ability and to accommodate the views expressed. I would be happy to ask my officials to talk with the principal of Dundee—we are always happy to be involved in a dialogue with him. I am also happy to reflect on the points that have been raised during the debate.

However, the Government amendment is the best wording that we can achieve. I shall not rehearse the arguments for it at this late hour but they are clear. The universities' natural anxiety about academic freedom should have been dissipated by now, if only by the numerous assurances that have been given during our deliberations.

Mr. Worthington: The Minister assures us that the door is not closed but that we are edging forward. The point of contention now appears to be how institutions may be affected. Given the Minister's assurance that, if we can find a better form of wording, it can be inserted in the Bill in another place, I shall not press the sub-amendments.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 10, in page 33, line 29, at end insert—

'( ) The Secretary of State may give general directions to the Council about the exercise of their functions.

( ) If it appears to the Secretary of State—

(a) that the financial affairs of any institution within the higher education sector have been or are being mismanaged; or

(b) that, in consequence of matters outwith the control of such an institution, it is likely that the financial position of the institution will be significantly adversely affected,

he may, after consulting the Council and the institution, give such directions to the Council about the provision of financial support in respect of the activities carried on by the institution as he considers are necessary or expedient by reason of the mismanagement or, as the case may be, adverse effect on the institution's financial position.'.

No. 84—new schedule—

"THE SCOTTISH FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

Status

1. The Funding Council shall not—

(a) be regarded as the servants or agents of the Crown;

(b) have any status, immunity or privilege of the Crown, and their property shall not be regarded as property of, or held on behalf of, the Crown.

Tenure of office and superannuation of members

2.—(1) The Funding Council shall consist of not less than twelve nor more than fifteen members appointed by the Secretary of State, of whom one shall be so appointed as chairman.

(2) In appointing members of the Funding Council the Secretary of State —

(a) shall have regard to the desirability of including persons who appear to him to have experience of, and to have shown capacity in, the provision of further education (within the meaning of section 1(5)(b) of the 1980 Act) or to have held, and to have shown capacity in, any position carrying responsibility for the provision of such further education and, in appointing such persons, he shall have regard to the desirability of their being currently engaged in the provision of such further education or in carrying responsibility for such provision; and

(b) shall have regard to the desirability of including persons who appear to him to have experience of, and to have shown capacity in, industrial, commercial or financial matters or the practice of any profession.

House of Commons disqualification

3. In Part III of Schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 (disqualifying offices) there is inserted at the appropriate place—

> "Any member of the Scottish Further Education Funding Council in receipt of remuneration."

Property and contracts

4. Subject to paragraphs 5 and 6 below, the Funding Council shall have the power—

- (a) to acquire, hold and dispose of land and other property;
- (b) to enter into contracts, including contracts for the employment of staff for the purposes of the discharge of their functions;
- (c) to invest any sums not immediately required by the Funding Council for the purpose of their carrying on any of the activities which they have power to carry on; and
- (d) to accept gifts of money, land or other property and apply it to, or hold or administer it in trust for, the purpose of the discharge of any of their functions.

5. The Funding Council shall not borrow money from any source, give any guarantee or indemnity or create any trust or security over or in respect of any of their property which was acquired, improved or maintained wholly or partly, directly or indirectly out of funds provided by the Secretary of State under section *[Payment of grants, etc. to Funding Council]* of this Act or from the proceeds of or any consideration for the disposal of any property so acquired, improved or maintained.

6.—(1) The Funding Council shall not dispose of any property acquired, improved or maintained wholly or partly, directly or indirectly, out of funds provided by the Secretary of State under the said section *[Payment of grants, etc. to Funding Council]* or from the proceeds of or any consideration for the disposal of any property so acquired, improved or maintained without the prior consent, given in writing, of the Secretary of State.

(2) The consent of the Secretary of State may be given in respect of a particular disposal of property or of disposals of any class or description and may be given subject to such conditions as the Secretary of State may determine.

(3) The consent of the Secretary of State is not required for the disposal of land which is or forms part of property mentioned in sub-paragraph (1) above where the disposal is in consequence of the compulsory acquisition of such land by any authority in pursuance of any power of compulsory acquisition under any enactment; but the Funding Council shall inform the Secretary of State of any such compulsory acquisition.

(4) Where any such property is disposed of, the Funding Council shall pay to the Secretary of State such portion of the proceeds or value of the consideration for the disposal, after deduction of such expenses as appear to the Secretary of State to have been reasonably incurred in the disposal, as the Secretary of State may, after consultation with the Funding Council, determine.

Execution of documents

7.—(1) For any purpose other than those mentioned in sub-paragraph (2) below, a document is validly executed by the Funding Council if it is signed on their behalf by a member of the Funding Council or by their secretary (or any person performing the duties of secretary to the Funding Council) or by any person authorised to sign the document on their behalf.

(2) For the purposes of any enactment or rule of law relating to the authentication of documents, a document is validly executed by the Funding Council if it is subscribed on their behalf by being executed in accordance with the provisions of sub-paragraph (1) above.

(3) A document which bears to have been executed by the Funding Council in accordance with sub-paragraph (2) above shall, in relation to such execution, be a probative document if the subscription of the document bears to have been attested by at least one witness.

Reports and accounts

8. The Funding Council shall make such reports or returns and give such information to the Secretary of State as he may require for the purposes of the exercise of his powers and the performance of his duties under this Part of this Act.

9.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Funding Council—

- (a) to keep proper accounts and proper records in relation to the accounts;
- (b) to prepare in respect of each financial year of the Funding Council a statement of accounts; and
- (c) to send copies of the statement to the Secretary of State and to the Comptroller and Auditor General before the end of the month of August next following the financial year to which the statement relates.

(2) The statement of accounts shall comply with any directions given by the Secretary of State with the approval of the Treasury as to—

- (a) the information to be contained in it;
- (b) the manner in which the information contained in it is to be presented; or
- (c) the methods and principles according to which the statement is to be prepared,

and shall contain such additional information as the Secretary of State may with the approval of the Treasury require to be provided for the information of Parliament.

(3) The Comptroller and Auditor General shall examine, certify and report on each statement received by him in pursuance of this paragraph and shall lay copies of each statement and of his report before each House of Parliament.

(4) In this paragraph "financial year" means the period beginning with the date on which the Funding Council is established and ending with the second 31st March following that date, and each successive period of twelve months.

Additional provisions

10. An order made under section *[Scottish Further Education Funding Council]* of this Act may contain such additional provisions—

- (a) relating to the membership, staff and proceedings of the Funding Council (including any committee of them);
- (b) relating to salaries, pensions, allowances and any other payments to be paid to members of the Funding Council (including any such committee) and to staff; and
- (c) as to the winding-up and dissolution of the Funding Council,

as the Secretary of State may consider necessary or expedient.

11. Employment with the Council shall be included among the kinds of employment to which a scheme under section 1 of the Superannuation Act 1972 can apply, and accordingly in Schedule 1 to that Act (in which those kinds of employment are listed), at the end of the list of "Other Bodies" there is inserted—

> "Scottish Further Education Funding Council."—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Schedule 1

CONSTITUTION AND PROCEEDINGS OF BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT

Mr. Worthington: I beg to move amendment No. 71, in page 37, line 12, leave out

'ten nor more than sixteen'

and insert

'fourteen nor more than twenty'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments:

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

No. 72, in page 37, line 22, at end insert—

'(e) no less than two persons nominated by the education authority in whose area the college is situated.'.

No. 73, in page 38, line 11, leave out 'sixteen' and insert 'twenty'.

Government amendments Nos. 53 to 55.

No. 75, in page 40, leave out lines 40 and 41.

No. 76, in page 40, line 42, at end insert—

'(2) For a period of two years commencing from the first transfer date, a member (whether elected or appointed) or an employee of a local authority, shall not be eligible for appointment as chairman, but, after that time has elapsed, no such restriction shall apply.'.

Mr. Worthington: The amendment seeks to improve the college boards of management by increasing their size to make them more representative. We obstinately continue to believe that people from the education authority should be on the boards because that will allow collaboration. That seems to be common sense. We do not wish to exclude local authority employees from chairing such a board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I made clear to the Committee considering the Bill, when we considered a similar amendment, that I do not consider that enlarging the size of boards would ensure that they are more effective. Nor do I consider that a better balance of interests would necessarily be achieved. I very much hope that board members will be able to take a broad view and not regard themselves as speaking for any narrow interest groups.

The Secretary of State will make the appointments to reconstitute college councils later this year. Those appointments will be based on the need to ensure a strong employer presence and on the basis of the personal qualities, experience and commitment that the individuals bring to the task. Those people will become the members of the first boards of management on 1 April 1993. I cannot, therefore, accept amendment No. 72.

However, I recognised the case made in Committee by the Opposition on an amendment seeking to restrict board members to serving no more than eight years. As we said in Committee, eight years seems too short a time for the college to capitalise on experience gained by individual members. However, having considered the matter carefully, I have tabled amendments Nos. 54 and 53, which will restrict board members to serving no more than three four-year terms of office, or 12 years in total. That will provide the college boards with new perspectives and new experience.

Amendment No. 55 is consequential and makes clear that in calculating the 12-year limit on membership of a board of management no account is taken of any previous service on a college council.

I have reflected on the position of elected councillors being allowed to become chairmen of college boards. I still remain of the view that that would be undesirable. Education authorities will have a duty to provide community education and a power to provide further education of the type falling within clause 6 of the Bill. Boards will be funded by the Secretary of State to provide both. The chairman of an authority's education committee could find himself chairing a board of management where serious conflict of interest could arise in the future.

It may be that, with the passage of years, the position would change, but that can be dealt with by the Secretary of State's order-making power in clause 3 to amend the provisions contained in schedule 1.

Those arrangements do not preclude education authority representatives either being appointed initially by the Secretary of State or subsequently by boards, but I stress that appointments will be made on the basis of personal qualities. I invite Opposition Members to acknowledge the concessions that I have made and to withdraw amendments Nos. 75 and 76.

Mr. Worthington: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 49, in schedule 1, page 37, line 21, leave out from 'being' to end of line 22 and insert

'nominated by the students' association of the college from among students of the college.'.

No. 50, in page 38, line 22, leave out from 'person' to 'whether' in line 23 and insert

'appointed by being nominated by the students' association of the college'.

No. 51, in page 38, line 33, leave out from beginning to 'shall' and insert

'appointed by being nominated by the students' association of the college'.

No. 52, in page 38, line 39, leave out from 'by' to 'shall' in line 40, and insert

'being nominated by the students' association of the college'.

No. 53, in page 38, line 44, after 'board', insert '—(a)'.

No. 54, in page 38, line 48, at end insert—

'; or

(b) where the total number of years of any previous terms of office (whether or not consecutive) served as a member of that board exceeds eight.'.

No. 55, in page 38, line 48, at end insert—

'(2) For the purpose of sub-paragraph (1)(b) above, in calculating the number of years served no account shall be taken of any term of office served as a member of a college council.'—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Schedule 4

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS FOR COLLEGE COUNCILS

Amendments made: No. 62, in page, 47 line, 43, at end insert—

( ) The terms and conditions on which the Secretary of State may make any grants under this paragraph may include in particular conditions—

(a) enabling him to require the repayment, in whole or in part, of sums paid by him if any other condition subject to which the sums were paid is not complied with; and

(b) requiring the payment of interest in respect of any period during which a sum due to him in accordance with any other condition remains unpaid,

but shall not relate to the application by the college council to which the grant is made of any sums derived otherwise than from the Secretary of State.'.

No. 56, in page 48, line 45, at end insert—

'Establishment of students' associations

—(1) Where, at the beginning of the transitional period, there is no students' association established for the students of the college, the college council shall, as soon as is practicable after that date (after consultation with such persons as appear to them to be representative of students of the college), make a scheme for the establishment of a students' association for students of the college.

(2) The primary function of a students' association of a college established under this paragraph shall be to represent the interests of students of such college.

(3) A scheme made under sub-paragraph (1) above shall include provision as to—

(a) the date on which the scheme is to come into effect, being a date not later than the day immediately before the first transfer date; and

(b) the initial composition and constitution of the students' association.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Schedule 6

THE SCOTTISH HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

Amendments made: No. 11, in page 52, line 41, leave out sub-section (7) and insert:

'(7) If an employee of the Council becomes a member of the Council and was by reference to his employment by the Council a participant in a pension scheme such as is mentioned in sub-paragraph (5) above—

(a) thee Council may determine that his service as a member shall be treated for the purposes of the scheme as service as an employee of the Council whether or not any benefits are to be payable to or in respect of him by virtue of paragraph 5 above; but

(b) if the Council determine as aforesaid, any discretion as to the benefits payable to or in respect of him which the scheme confers on the Council shall be exercised only with the consent of the Secretary of State given with the approval of the Treasury.'.

No. 12, in page 54, line 2, leave out from 'accounts' to 'and' in line 3.

No. 13, in line 6, at end insert—

'( ) The statement of accounts referred to in sub-paragraph (1)(b) above shall comply with any directions given by the Secretary of State with the approval of the Treasury as to—

(a) the information to be contained in it,

(b) the manner in which the information contained in it is to be presented, or

(c) the methods and principles according to which the statement is to be prepared,

and shall contain such additional information as the Secretary of State may with the approval of the Treasury require to be provided for the information of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Schedule 8

MISCELLANEOUS AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 14, in page 57, line 44, after 'for', insert

'the Scottish Further Education Funding Council or'.

No. 15, in page 58, line 32, after 'for' insert

'the Scottish Further Education Funding Council or'.

Mr. Worthington: I beg to move amendment No. 77, in page 59, line 22, after 'Act', insert

', in section 51, of this Act'.

Do the Government accept the amendment?

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Much as I would like to assist the hon. Gentleman, I cannot as I do not accept that transport for students at boards of management colleges should remain with education authorities. Therefore, I suggest that the hon. Gentleman withdraws the amendment. However, guidance will be given to boards on the exercise of their powers and I shall monitor the position to ensure that the present level of provision is at least maintained.

Mr. Tom Clarke: I remind the House of the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) that, at present, under section 51 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that transport is provided where necessary. It is obvious that, not only is it necessary for students with disabilities to have reasonable transport, but that their transport often has to be specially adapted. As there is a clear obligation on the local authorities which is not, under the Bill, being given to the boards responsible for further education, that could cause difficulties for such people.

I am sorry that the Minister has not found it possible to agree with the reasonable amendment. I do not want to add to the controversy that we had earlier by saying that, yet again—and I congratulate them on this—our colleagues have obtained more in the English legislation than we have—*[Interruption.]* The Minister indicates dissent, but I won the last argument and I am not sure whether he wants another one at this late hour. But as he was profoundly unconvincing, and as another place is at present still considering the English position, I would not wish to force the point on the House.

I hope that another place will have a perhaps more inspired attitude to these matters.

Mr. Forsyth: As to winning the argument, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has grasped the difference in structure between the Scottish Bill and the English Bill. The duty in the Scottish Bill to provide further education remains with the Secretary of State; in the case of the English Bill it is transferred to the council. That is why there is a difference in provisions. The hon. Gentleman is confusing duties which remain with the Secretary of State and with the council.

11.15 pm

Under clause 8(2)(c) boards have power to provide to students of the college such assistance of a financial or other nature as they may consider appropriate. That will enable them to respond flexibly to the transport needs of their students, including students with learning difficulties. As I said to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), I propose that guidance will be given to the boards on the exercise of that power. I will monitor the position to ensure that the present level of provision is at least maintained.

The hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) has nothing to fear from the provisions. I understand his anxiety about the matter, but the Bill will ensure that the provision of transport is at least as good as is provided at present and may very well be improved.

Amendment negatived.

Amendments made: No. 82, in page 59, line 34, at end insert—

'( ) In section 65B (provision for recorded children who have ceased to be of school age) after subsection (6) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(6A) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (c) of subsection (6) above, the reference in that paragraph to any other body shall include a reference to the board of management of a college of further education (within the meaning of Part I of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992) making provision from which, in the opinion of the authority, the child might benefit.".'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

No. 57, in page 60, line 10, at end insert—

'Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 c. 36

. In section 11(1) of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 (training and occupation of the mentally handicapped)—

(a) after the words "operation of" there shall be inserted "(a)"; and

(b) after the word "mind)" there shall be inserted the words 'or

(b) section 1 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 (which imposes a duty on the secretary of State to secure the provision of adequate and efficient further education in Scotland),".'.—*[Mr. Michael Forsyth.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent signified.]

11.16 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill introduces fundamental reforms to further and higher education in Scotland and has been widely welcomed there. The Committee stage was marked by co-operative and constructive debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for his sensitive and skilful handling of the Bill in Committee and to Opposition Members for their positive approach to many aspects of the Bill. I feel sure that it is a better Bill than when it started. Of course, parallel debates in another place have informed our deliberations.

The Bill is an important measure of devolution. In further education, it devolves power from local authorities to local self-governing boards. The Government have met much of the anxiety of Opposition Members through the provision for a possible further education funding council to be established at a later date. In higher education, it introduces devolution from a United Kingdom funding council to a new Scottish body, something that has been universally welcomed by universities and others.

It is also an important measure to remove the artificial binary line in higher education. It introduces new arrangements for degree-awarding powers and for achieving university status. Scottish higher education is expanding rapidly and achieving new heights. As I said on Second Reading, there is an explosion of opportunity for our young people. The Bill matches the needs of the times, and I commend it to the House.

11.18 pm

Mr. Worthington: Briefly, I should like to respond to the Secretary of State and to express my thanks to my hon. Friends who have contributed positively to improving the Bill. I am glad that the Secretary of State paid tribute to the co-operative spirit in which we approached the Bill.

The Bill is in two halves. The further education part is virtually friendless in Scotland. There has been no sentiment for it. The only body of people who have been behind the Bill have been the principals of the colleges, and what did they say? They said that something had to be done to put right the mess which the Government had made of the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989. They said that difficulty had been created because of the uncertainty of poll tax funding and of the regime laid down by the Government.

The Opposition welcome the transfer to Scotland of responsibility for higher education and the ending of the binary divide. Many apprehensions about academic freedom have been expressed, but we are moving towards a solution of that problem. We are still worried about quality, however—the change in the nature of the relationship between research and teaching. We are not convinced that the Government pay enough attention to quality.

I thank the Minister for delivering every one of the pledges that he gave us in Committee. The Bill is considerably the better for that.

I thank all who have assisted the Bill's passage through the House.

11.20 pm

Mr. Dalyell: I echo the words of my hon. Friend——

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Get on with it.

Mr. Dalyell: I will not. On second thoughts, I am always obedient to the Whips.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), I thank the Minister for his courtesy to the Committee. His civil service team put in considerable efforts. The Minister is fortunate indeed to have such high-quality civil servants at the Scottish Office.

I fear that the Secretary of State was not right to claim that the Bill is universally welcomed. Count me out of that. More importantly, count out many of the science, engineering and medical professors in Scottish universities. There is considerable scepticism about the measure, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. Of course, there may be widespread approval in certain circles, but it is far from widespread in other circles of important people who will have to make the Bill work.

I do not concede for a moment that this is a devolution measure.

The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) will recollect very well that, in 1980, he piloted the Wildlife and Countryside Bill through the House. Some of us said that we would keep an eye on what happened to that Act in the years that followed. In the past 11 years, some of us have done precisely that, justifiably sending endless letters to the Department of the Environment.

I shall certainly keep a beady eye on this development, which I do not welcome. If some of those who proposed it are proved right in several years' time, I hope that I will admit as much, but I have grave doubts nevertheless, and they are shared by a large number of heavyweight people in the Scottish universities.

I hope that my colleagues will be able to effect what they say they will in respect of part I of the Bill. I believe in local authorities; their relationship with further education was extremely valuable.

I hope that I will prove to be wrong about the Bill. In the meantime, I am always obedient to the Whips, so I shall leave it at that.

11.23 pm

Mr. Stephen: It was interesting to be given an insight earlier this evening into the Minister's attitude to his own brief. At times he was clearly not too pleased with the words he was reading out.

If the House will bear with me, I too can give hon. Members an insight into the words on my brief by reading them out:

> "I should begin by saying that the Report stage was dominated by Government amendments, which I believe is rare. This was because of the number of concessions made by the Minister, who on the whole gave a sympathetic response to many of the concerns expressed by members.
>
> Everyone is grateful for that."

I can bear to say that, and I am happy to do so sincerely. The discussion in Committee and on Report has been positive and good natured.

We welcome the fact that provision for special needs is included in the Bill for the first time. Part I, with the inclusion of some form of commitment to a funding council, is an improvement, but we cannot support the removal of further education from local authorities. I remain firmly convinced, as does almost everyone in Scotland, that the Bill is a centralising measure which was brought about as much by the Government's hostility to local authorities and by the difficulties of the poll tax as by anything else. Where else did the great idea come from? Was it a Government commitment which was part of their manifesto? It was not. It was totally unexpected, and there was little if any warning for the local authorities involved. It is no great exaggeration to say that an accountable and integrated further education system is yet another victim of the disastrous poll tax.

Part II is far more welcome. We support a separate funding council, although we should prefer to see that under a Scottish Parliament. We also welcome the abolition of the binary divide. On a personal basis, I very much welcome the commitments given to RGIT in Committee.

There are aspects of the funding council which we shall seek to change in the other place. The council should have strategic planning powers so that the distribution of funds can be more firmly tied to the needs and shape of higher education. There remain concerns that academic freedom is not as entrenched as it should be. Although I appreciate the difficulties in wording, that remains an area of real concern to many principals in Scottish universities.

The failure to include some provision for the welfare of students is also deeply regrettable. Although the Bill in its present form is a significant improvement on its first form, it remains seriously flawed. I hope that we can see further improvements to the Bill in its later stages.

11.26 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: It seems but yesterday that the Bill was given its Second Reading on 26 November, yet there has been a great deal of debate of its contents. At that stage, the Secretary of State said that the Bill was a tremendous step forward for Scottish education, and suggested that it was almost home rule being delivered in one fell swoop. That was a slight overestimate of the position, because all that the Bill involves is the transfer of very limited powers to organisations in Scotland.

The debate in Committee has taken place against a background of what the Chinese, who are celebrating their new year this week, would call "interesting times". The matters first raised in Committee will be discussed further in the general election, as we move towards far larger constitutional changes.

The Bill has been a step in the right direction. I have consistently supported the idea of a higher and further education council for our institutions in Scotland. I also place it on record that I very much welcomed the Minister's attitude in Committee. At times, he seemed to have to cope single-handedly with everything that came from the Opposition. The Committee was conspicuous for the fact that Conservative Members made few contributions; the majority came from the Opposition.

Although I have fundamental disagreements with the Minister on many issues, I acknowledge that he made many concessions to the logical arguments of hon. Members from the three Opposition parties involved. That is to be much encouraged and welcomed by us all.

I also pay tribute to those who wrote to us, including the principals of the colleges, the regional authorities which were deeply involved and various organisations—not least the voluntary organisations, which were concerned about particular issues such as students with special needs. It is valuable that their contributions have been so accurately recorded, both in Committee and on Report.

During our discussions, we have raised many issues that need deeper and further explanation if we are to achieve the right results for Scottish education. I think especially of our debate tonight on new clause 15, when there was an inadequate response from the Government, who appeared to have inadequate knowledge of the points being raised. That, in itself, is an argument for the establishment of a Select Committee on Scottish affairs, which could consider in more detail an education system that we all value highly.

I hope that when the Bill goes to another place the words recorded in the *Official Report*, spoken both in Committee and on the Floor of the House, will be examined carefully and that what we have started will be built upon to make the Bill even better than it is.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

11.30 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I believe that there will be a consensus across the House on the Bill. As its provisions will be beneficial to many people, I hope that we shall deal with it expeditiously.

The House will recall that in the latter part of last year both my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlined measures to be taken by both the Government and mortgage lenders with the excellent aim of reducing the level of repossessions that were occurring at that time. Whatever party we belong to, all were agreed that that was a desirable aim.

Mortgage rescue schemes are an important part of that initiative. I am sure that we are all glad that many of the lenders—building societies, banks and others—have come forward with schemes to ensure, or at least to advance the proposition, that the number of repossessions should be reduced to the absolute minimum. The Bill will be a further significant contribution towards the vital aim of bringing reassurance to people who might otherwise be at risk of losing their homes. I am especially glad that lenders have given assurances that they will not repossess homes where direct payments are being made to cover the mortgage interest.

The Bill provides for the direct payment to qualifying lenders of the mortgage interest component of income support. It builds on existing, more limited arrangements that we have already introduced, which rely on suitable cases being referred to an adjudication officer who considers whether it is in the interests of the claimant for direct payments to be made. Those arrangements have already proved to be a useful interim measure—but they are only that, pending the introduction of the Bill, which provides for a much more comprehensive scheme. It will provide the basis for detailed regulations, which will come before the House in due course, to come into effect from April.

The Bill will cover those income support claimants who have an amount for mortgage interest included in their income support assessment. I think that by anybody's judgment, they should be making appropriate payments to qualifying lenders. The Bill will cover all such claimants, but the regulations specify the point at which the direct payments will start.

Many unemployed claimants stay on benefit for less than 16 weeks, during which only 50 per cent. of the mortgage interest is payable. After 16 weeks, the income support calculation for claimants under 60 years of age includes 100 per cent. of the eligible mortgage interest. Accordingly, we intend to provide in regulations for direct payments to start once that 100 per cent. of the eligible interest becomes payable in income support.

Perhaps I ought to make it clear that, when we talk of qualified lenders, we have in mind building societies, banks, insurance companies and other institutional lenders. Local authorities and certain other public bodies with home loan facilities will also be included. It has been possible, relatively simply, to prescribe most qualifying lenders on the face of the Bill, but I hope that the Opposition and others will understand that provision for others, including some institutional and centralised lenders, can be made in the regulations that we shall introduce in due course.

The arrangements will, of course, impose a significant increase in administrative costs on the Benefits Agency. We therefore felt it appropriate, in our discussions with the lenders, to negotiate a contribution from lenders, so that the increased costs would be met at least in part by them and not entirely by the Government. I am glad to say that the Council of Mortgage Lenders has agreed to such an arrangement.

As I said at the outset, the scheme that the Bill introduces forms part of a positive and collaborative response from the Government and the lending institutions. The lenders have given assurances that they will not repossess the homes of people on income support whose mortgage interest is paid direct. In addition, lenders are drawing up mortgage rescue schemes, and are also examining ways of easing the terms of repayment to help people to stay in their homes.

I believe that, in introducing the Bill, the Government are playing their part, in collaboration with the lending institutions, in providing a powerful and constructive means of increasing the security of many people who might otherwise risk losing their homes. I hope that the House will agree that the Bill deserves a Second Reading and, indeed, passage into law.

11.36 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): Although we shall support the Bill because we believe that any measure that alleviates the terrible problem of repossessions is to be welcomed, the way in which the Minister presented it suggests that there is no problem. We should view the Bill in the light of the package of panic measures that were announced in December, as the rapidly rising tide of repossessions threatened finally to engulf the remnants of this lame-duck Government.

The Council of Mortgage Lenders estimated that there would be up to 100,000 repossessions in 1991—a staggering 120 per cent. increase on the previous year. The cause of the problem is absolutely clear, and is twofold. First, there is the utter incompetence of the Government's management of the economy; secondly, there are its housing policies, described in *The Independent* as

"a disaster waiting to happen".

The management of the economy has caused massive interest rates, crippling mortgage rates and escalating unemployment. The Minister for Housing, who I am pleased to see is present, recognised in a previous debate that unemployment was a crucial part of the problem of repossessions. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) would like to intervene, I should be pleased to give way, but if he listens he may learn something.

We must also blame the blinkered ideological dogma of a Government who have put owner-occupation at the top of every list, at the expense of decent affordable housing. Although we support the right-to-buy legislation, we wish that the capital receipts could be used by local authorities to provide affordable housing so that people would not be forced into owner-occupation that they cannot afford. The consequence of these two strands of Government mismanagement of the economy has led to the appalling problem of homelessness, evictions, marriage breakdown and the human misery associated with the scandalous mismanagement of housing policy by the Government.

The building societies are not without blame, due to their lending policies during the 1980s which led to individual circumstances not being properly taken into account. The provision of 100 per cent. mortgages, as well as deferred interest schemes and low-start mortgages, led to the Government having to introduce these panic measures. The Labour party warned the Government of the time bomb that was being being created by their policies months before they took any action to try to stem the flow of repossessions. We should pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), who produced a proper, comprehensive mortgage rescue package long before the Government considered taking any of their panic measures.

What has happened since December, leading to the Bill that we are debating, shows clearly that the Government were more interested in grabbing the headlines about repossessions than in taking any action to stem the flow of repossessions.

Mr. Scott: I apologise for intervening during the hon. Gentleman's speech, but may we be absolutely clear about where the Opposition stand on these matters? The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) made certain remarks, which I gather have been repudiated by the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, about housing expenditure and the way in which resources from the sale of houses will be made available.

Mr. Bradley: What is more important is that the Government should recognise that repossessions cause real problems. We want to know whether the Government are tackling them. I should be happy to give way to the Minister if he could tell us how many schemes have been agreed with the building societies to tackle the problem, how many properties will be involved in those schemes and how many people have been helped by building society rescue packages. Can the Minister give us the absolute numbers involved?

Mr. Scott: A number of schemes have been announced. If the hon. Gentleman reads the national press, he will know how they are coming forward. I still want him to tell the House where he stands in the dispute between the shadow Housing Minister and the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. There are clear differences between them. The House is therefore entitled to know where the hon. Gentleman stands in that dispute.

Mr. Bradley: The Minister is clearly unable to tell us about even one scheme that is in place that is helping people over repossessions.

There is no clear statistical evidence of the effects that the Bill will have on repossessions. What we know from the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) is that in May 1990 the annual equivalent of £553 million was paid to 310,000 claimants. There are no official statistics showing the number of income support claimants with mortgage arrears, so we have no evidence of the number of people who will be helped by the Bill.

Even if that information were available, it is not clear what proportion of the arrears could be averted by the direct payment of income support. The Council of Mortgage Lenders estimates that it will save 40,000 repossessions in 1992 but a recent report by UBS Phillips and Drew, entitled "Housing Market: An Economic Time Bomb", estimates that only 10,000 repossessions will be saved by the direct payment of income support. It still expects 80,000 mortgage repossessions in 1992. As I said, that is no better than last year.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Langbaurgh): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to repossessions in the north-east and draw a comparison? Between January and August 1990, there were 5,460 repossessions, but between January and August 1991, repossessions nearly doubled to 8,830. Since the Chancellor made his announcement in December, no progress has been made, and people regularly come to tell me that their houses have been repossessed.

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I repeat my question to the Minister—how many schemes are currently in place to help people in the rescue package? There is still a staggering silence on that issue.

It should also be noted first that many essential housing costs of owner-occupation are not covered by income support and have to be met out of claimants' remaining basic benefit. I shall return to this issue later, but for the first 16 weeks only 50 per cent. of the interest is covered. Secondly, premiums for insurance policies linked to endowment mortgages are not covered. Thirdly, any costs for the maintenance of buildings are not covered. Therefore, it is possible that the Government and the lenders have overestimated the positive impact of the proposal on lenders' receipts and underestimated the problems which direct payments will cause to claimants.

I shall consider the second point in more detail because, contrary to some opinions, claimants usually put a high value on the retention of their home. Diversions of income support mortgage interest payments for other purposes in many cases reveal not mismanagement of benefits but the struggle claimants have in managing on the very low level of benefit of income support.

There is increasing concern about the multiple deductions from basic benefit faced by many claimants. An article in *The Guardian* on 24 January assured us that

> "more than one in ten relying on income support now face pre-payment deductions to meet debts for poll tax, fuel and other bills."

Another direct deduction from benefits will put greater pressure on the already meagre benefits to which many people are entitled through income support.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman must understand that these deductions are not from the generality of income support but from payments specifically included in the applicable amount for mortgage payments. Surely it is right that the payments which are included in income support are paid to the mortgage lenders.

Mr. Bradley: The Minister is right, and that is why we are supporting the Bill. I am trying to point out that the argument that mortgage payments are being frittered away because some people have enough money in benefits to pay other bills is not true. The only way to help people is to increase benefits to a level that would cover the essential payments.

[Mr. Bradley]

As I said, direct deductions cause great hardship and fly in the face of the Government's response to the social security advisory committee in 1986. The Government said:

> "direct payments are both complex and costly administratively; and they diminish the claimant's responsibility to manage their own affairs."

We must consider the benefit level in the light of that statement.

The fundamental issue that is not covered in the Bill is that claimants are entitled to only 50 per cent. mortgage interest payments for the first 16 weeks of an income support claim. It is worth remembering that it was the Prime Minister, then wearing the hat of the Minister of State for Social Security, who introduced the cut in benefit in December 1986. Even he recognised at the time that the change was "contentious". He also said that it would have no effect on repossessions.

The Opposition believe that allowing only 50 per cent. for the first 16 weeks causes hardship to claimants, and can cause or exacerbate arrears which are then difficult to recover. Many claimants have problems in covering the cost in those weeks. In spite of the Minister's contention about people going off benefit within that period, the case is not proved. The arrears may not subsequently be pulled back.

Claimants who move into low-paid work get no help with their mortgage interest once they leave income support. Many pressure groups—representatives of the Child Poverty Action Group have been at the forefront of them—support the view that the Government should now withdraw the 50 per cent. rule and provide 100 per cent. help with mortgage interest repayments as soon as a claimant comes on to income support. That is our policy, and that is what we shall do.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Michael Jack): Is that a pledge?

Mr. Bradley: It is an absolute pledge that that is what the Labour party will do.

I shall say something about the plight of home owners on low incomes—people who are not on income support. As we all know, the only help that they receive is through mortgage interest relief at source—MIRAS. An increasing number of claimants are worried about their ability to afford mortgage repayments if they go into low-paid work and are no longer eligible for income support.

A study by Steve Webb and Steve Wilcox for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, entitled, "Time for Mortgage Benefits", and published in November 1991, showed that a couple with two children on mortgage payments of £70 a week would have to earn more than £200 a week before they would be better off than on income support.

In contrast, as the Minister knows, reasonable rent payments are eligible for housing benefit whether someone is on income support or not. The anomaly is especially ironic for a Government committed to extending home ownership. Indeed, we believe that it determined the shape of the mortgage rescue package, in that owner-occupiers have to be converted into tenants to take advantage of the scheme.

I believe that one of the reasons why the scheme has not really got off the ground is that, even when people are converted into tenants, when the housing associations take over properties they realise that the rents that would have to be charged are so high that people in difficulty with their mortgages would still have to make very high payments even if such properties were converted to rented accommodation.

If the rescue packages are in place between the building societies and the housing associations, will the Minister tell us whether the rents will be affordable, and whether they will be covered by housing benefit?

The anomaly will become even more evident when the change in qualifying hours of work for income support is made in April. For new claimants the qualifying period will be reduced from 16 hours or more, and the income support problem will become more serious.

The Government should now consider extending help with mortgage costs to people who are not on income support—*[Interruption.]* I am asking the Government now in place to consider the idea that I have suggested, in the light of the problems that have been experienced. *[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members wish to intervene, I shall be happy to take their questions.

Even the Prime Minister recognised the problem when, as a Social Security Minister, he introduced the 50 per cent. rule. On 16 December, 1986, he said:

> "social security help applies only to those without jobs. There is an imbalance there"—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 1129.]

We support the Bill, because any help to alleviate the horrors of losing a home is welcome, but we believe that it is too little and too late. If the Government had listened to us, many thousands of people who were home owners would not have lost their homes, or suffered the appalling misery associated with homelessness.

We firmly believe that a much more comprehensive package of measures should be put into place. As I said, we support the package proposed by our Front Bench before the Government introduced their panic measures.

We support the present Bill, but, as a Labour Government, we shall very soon welcome the opportunity to introduce comprehensive measures on housing and economic policy that will ensure that people keep their homes rather than suffer the misery inflicted on them by the Government.

11.55 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): My speech will be short and to the point, because the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) has already referred to many of the points made by the pressure groups.

The Government must examine the trends that have been developing since the early 1980s. I accept that they are not all entirely within the remit of the Department of Social Security. The Minister for Housing and Planning, who is in his place, has some responsibility to examine some of the difficulties that have been caused. It is quite clear why those difficulties have arisen. In the early 1980s, the Government—properly, in my view—were encouraging people to enter into home ownership. With the benefit of hindsight, I think that some people on relatively low incomes were perhaps given rather too much encouragement to go into home ownership. Then, in the mid-1980s, came a series of hikes in the interest rates that those people had to pay.

The trends must have been clear even to the Department. In 1979, it was paying about £31 million in income support for mortgage interest costs. That figure has now increased to about £600 million in 1992—a 900 per cent. increase. That is a lot of money. The Department cannot ignore that increase; nor can it ignore the extent of the difficulties that flow from the fact that many of those people—the figure is now one in 100—face repossession.

Although I support the Bill, I think that it is an inadequate response to that deepening problem—if it is the only response that the Government are prepared to make. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, who is to reply to the debate, will say what thought is now being given to the on-going trends.

In his statement of 19 December, the Chancellor of the Exchequer adverted to the fact that we do not really know as much as we would like about how many people on income support are in difficulty and not passing on their payments to the lender. One of the Government's intentions was to make efforts to find out more about that between now and April. It would inform the debate if the Under-Secretary could say what progress is being made in that direction. That is an important official statistic to know.

Is there any cause to revise the initial predictions that the Government were making about the number of repossessions that the Bill might prevent in the coming year? That, too, is an important figure. I was disturbed to discover that, in its report "Housing Market: the Economic Time Bomb", UBS Phillips and Drew was still predicting about 80,000 repossessions in 1992, notwithstanding the improvements that will be made by the Bill. It would help if the Minister would say something about what has happened since December, when the action proposed in the Bill was announced. What changes, if any, have been made?

I strongly support the points made by the hon. Member for Withington about the potential exacerbation of the situation by the change in the remunerative work rule. As I have said before, I well understand the reasons for that, and I am sympathetic to what the Government are doing in terms of the influence on family credit, but it is not acceptable for the Government to say that they cannot assess the full impact of the change on repossessions.

I have read and understood the report of the Standing Committee in which the Minister set out the transitional protection—that is fine and good—but have the Government considered finding a way of totally idemnifying those who will come on to income support in the future and who might be caught by the change in the 24 hour rule to 16 to try to give those people some access to the protection that is available to them until the change is made in April? There must be some people who will lose.

I do not believe that, with good will, it is impossible to address that problem, and I shall be interested to hear the Government's view. I know that they have tried to limit that damage, but I believe that the problem will be exacerbated if yet more is not done to address it. If the Department puts its mind to it, I am sure that there must be some way of retaining the existing entitlement.

I am also concerned about multiple deductions. The report of the Social Security Advisory Committee was compelling. I understand the Minister's point when he intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Withington—that we are talking about a deduction not from basic benefit, but from an addition. However, in addition to the provisions affecting mortgage interest, a whole series of deductions is now biting on people's basic benefit. The Government must address the way in which that is increasing, and consider it carefully in conjunction with the SSAC and some of the other pressure groups, because it is beginning to affect people's freedom to choose.

An important part of the Government's policy previously was that people should have the ability to deploy their benefits. In their evidence to the SSAC, the Government argued vociferously that they did not want to incur the high costs of administering the benefits. We should not lose sight of the fact that there appears to have been a considerable change.

A mortgage benefit scheme of the kind for which Webb and Wilcox argued in the Rowntree Foundation report bears some examination. As I understand that we now spend about £5 billion per year on housing benefit, with a tax expenditure of £7 billion on mortgage interest tax relief, to move towards a scheme that would add on another £400 million and take the total cost of mortgage benefits in a full year to about £1 billion is not out of kilter with the trends of the past two or three years.

There must be some way of redeploying some of the MITR tax expenditure. I know that that will be difficult but, over a period, it should be possible to construct some way of redeploying some of the benefit, even if we are not talking about big total increases in benefits expenditure. I hope that the Department is doing some work on that, at least to the extent of studying the Webb and Wilcox scheme.

The Government should also examine the £35 million that it would cost to reintroduce the 50 per cent. payment in the first 16 weeks. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how many repossessions such expenditure might save. Does the Department have any idea of the level of repossessions that might be avoided if that £35 million was expended? It must have some estimate of that. If not, it is high time it did.

Finally, more resources should be made available to enable the mortgage-to-rent schemes to work effectively. According to the Government's own philosophy, they are an efficient solution to the problem. Although I have not seen any costings of the amount that would be required to make a mortgage-to-rent scheme a viable proposition, having looked at the trends, my assessment is that the position will get worse before it gets better.

I do not know how easy it will be to find big sums of money, but I am persuaded that redeployment within the existing system in terms of tax expenditure through MITR and the rest should now be re-examined by the Treasury and the Department of the Environment, as well as by the Department of Social Security, if we are to try to make some real changes and improvements in the coming 12 months.

12.4 am

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Much could be said in this debate, but I shall make just three short points which may help. The background to the debate is the repossessions that have taken place. All of us have constituency experience of the individual tragedy that that can be for those whose property is being repossessed. It is worth looking at the numbers involved.

The numbers produced by the Council of Mortgage Lenders show that for the first half of 1991 repossessions

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

amounted to exactly 0·4 of 1 per cent. of all mortgages. In other words, 99·6 per cent. of all mortgages were not repossessed. Even bearing in mind that those figures will presumably increase somewhat in the second half of the year, to look at those figures is an exercise in flaccid hyperbole which does not take the argument forward.

Secondly, anyone who has ever done debt counselling —I have done it in the context of matrimonial breakdown when I have acted as a solicitor—will know that, when trying to rearrange a person's debts, it is often those who ask most for the money who must be paid off first. They want to see what money a person has available. To say that the money is available but earmarked for mortgage does not impress those who press most strongly for the repayment of a particular debt. It would give a measure of security to people to be able to say that they do not receive the money and it cannot be treated as part of their income. No one who has not been in this position or who has not acted for people in this position can know the terrible pressure to pay the worst, the most pressing, debt immediately. This is a real advantage, and will help debt counsellors.

Finally, it has been hinted at in this debate and certainly in the country that in some way the Government may be passing on their responsibilities by asking mortgage lenders to play a part in helping those who face repossession. I would not want to generalise, but there are some specifics that the House can know about.

I know of a case in my constituency where a major building society advanced a mortgage to a man earning £8,000 a year in fairly insecure circumstances. It took into account his wife's £4,000 a year when it was obvious from their family circumstances that she was likely to become pregnant again. On an income of £12,000 a year, it advanced a mortgage of £40,000. To add insult to injury, the building society then sold them an endowment policy. That may not be a typical case but, equally, it is not an isolated case.

When that can happen in the marketplace it in no way absolves people from the responsibility to look after themselves and to bear in mind that they must borrow responsibly. At the same time, the disparity in the bargaining position means that if on occasions building societies are capable of behaving in that way, when a proper mortgage rescue plan is put to them, they have a responsibility to join in. That is why it is entirely proper for the Government to say that, although they will take the lead, they expect others also to play a part.

12.7 am

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I will not detain the House long. I fear that there is an anomaly in the present regime for paying mortgage interest payments through the Benefits Agency which I hope will be addressed in the Bill or the regulations that will be made under it.

The anomaly was brought to my attention rather forcefully during the past 24 hours by a constituency case in Stamford. I understand that at present—the position has been the same for some time and will continue under the proposed regime—where a claimant for income support receives mortgage interest payments from the Benefits Agency, the claimant may sell his or her existing house and move into a new one. The mortgage interest payments continue to be met so long as the claimant remains eligible. Clearly, that provision is sensible, particularly where the claimant is trading down, having offered a decline in his or her financial position. I have no quarrel with that. Indeed, I am very much in favour of it.

The problem arises because, whereas normally a mortgage lender would look to the creditworthiness of the individual borrower, in particular to his or her salary level, in this case the only cash flow available to the claimant is income support and mortgage interest payments that are being met by the Benefits Agency. It follows that the building society, bank or lender must look to those payments as security and needs some assurance that that cash flow will be available to meet the interest payments on the renewed mortgage. When the claimant has moved house, the mortgage is formally considered as a new one.

The problem is that the Benefits Agency is not allowed, under the rules imposed on it by the Department of Social Security, to give any formal commitment to the lender that the mortgage interest payments will be met—even a commitment that is hedged with certain conditions. It is impossible for the Benefits Agency even to state formally to the lender or potential lender that the claimant is, at the relevant time, entitled to receive mortgage interest payments from the agency.

Clearly there is a mismatch in such circumstances and it is impossible for the lender to decide to lend until he has some assurance that the mortgage interest payments will be met. Equally, it is no doubt impossible for the Benefits Agency to give any assurance to the claimant until the mortgage lender has made a commitment to lend. That can be a heart-rending problem for someone who has to move house while being dependent upon payments from the Benefits Agency.

That problem is being experienced by one of my constituents in Stamford and no doubt he is losing a lot of sleep tonight. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues will consider this matter. It would be ideal if I were told that I had misunderstood, that there was no problem and that my constituent has nothing to worry about. If the problem appears to be slightly less easy to resolve than the theory suggests, I hope that I might trespass on their time by supplying them with the details of my constituent's case.

12.11 am

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Some weeks ago the *Financial Times* put an interesting perspective on the debate when it explained that the mortgage interest payments from income support were to be paid direct to the lenders, because that meant that tenants avoided the temptation of wasting that income support on food.

Such thinking belongs to the same bracket of unbelievable cheek as that displayed by Lord Hanson and Lord White. They took some time off from their destruction of British manufacturing industry to visit the House of Lords in their Rolls-Royces. They did so to vote in favour of the proposal that the poorest people—those on income support—should still pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax in its last year. That behaviour and the thinking revealed in the *Financial Times* typifies the attitude that many Conservative Members adopt towards poverty and the problem of repossessions. That is how they deal with people who are suffering because of 13 years of Government economic mismanagement.

What we are witnessing tonight is the parliamentary clean-up operation for the publicity stunt of November and December, when the Government wanted to create the headlines to give the impression that something was being done about the repossession crisis that they had created. The Chancellor of the Exechequer and the Secretary of State for Social Security came to the House to make their respective announcements. The Prime Minister got his publicity with the usual fawning headlines. The editorials gave the Government what they sought—the suggestion that somehow they had produced the solution to the problem. But they created that problem.

Tonight we are the bit players in the tidying-up operation necessary to get the legislation through. That is a measure of how seriously the Government view this problem.

Since that day, not one family has benefited from the scheme that the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Social Security put forward. Not one family has benefited from all that publicity. The only beneficiary has been the Conservative party, serving its own electoral purposes.

I am glad to see the Minister for Housing and Planning here tonight. He may even say a few words about the scheme's success so far. After all the alleged effort on his behalf, as far as we know—the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security may enlighten us when she winds up the debate—only one building society is pursuing a scheme in respect of mortgage assistance. All that sound and fury just for one scheme that is not even operative at present. If a family that is suffering or threatened with repossession goes along to the Nationwide, it will not yet be assisted. Was the scheme worth all that effort and publicity?

Many good, imaginative and creative schemes are available, many of which were proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley). There are ways out of the problem, and the trend of repossessions can be reduced. In those circumstances, what is needed is the will to do it, rather than trying to kid people in the newspapers. The Government must put the money where it is necessary so that people can buy new homes or, better still, stay in their homes.

Last year, 75,000 people suffered repossessions and, according to UBS Phillips and Drew, even more people will probably suffer repossessions in the coming year. I hope that those figures will decline and that the Government will find the will to make real progress in the matter, but in the several months that have elapsed since the big hoo-hah for electoral purposes, little political will has been invested in getting those schemes off the ground.

The basis on which the Government are bringing forward the Bill is that the lenders—building societies and others—are not receiving the element of income support that they should receive. I have no doubt that, in some cases, that is true, but it is staggering that a Government who have been in power for 13 years and seen the number of repossessions rise steadily have undertaken no serious research into the facts.

How many people are not using their income support as we would wish? If we ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he says, "Dunno." If we ask the Secretary of State, he answers, "Couldn't tell you, really." If we ask the Minister, he answers, "Disproportionate costs—can't tell you." Despite the fact that they do not know the basis on which the scheme has been proposed, they are prepared to divert what may amount to £350 million to building societies.

That is not a bad little earner and will provide some nice cash flow for building societies. The only basis on which that figure can be put forward is a Council of Mortgage Lenders' survey conducted by telephone. Hon. Members know how carefully we should treat results discovered by telephone surveys, yet the Government consider that £350 million will do the job, and they have gone ahead.

The figures are so high because the amount spent on the mortgage element of income support is 10 times higher than it was in 1979. I hope that the Government are thoroughly ashamed of the fact that, in their tenure of office, that figure has risen tenfold. The party of home owners has turned into the party of wreckers and repossessers. They now seek, at the bitter dog-end of a Parliament, 13 years too late, to make amends.

Who is responsible for the foul-up? Who would have been stupid enough to block direct payments when they were on offer four or five years ago? Who would have been silly enough to prevent the income support going directly to the lenders? We know where the trail leads—it is heavily signposted and it leads back to 1986, when the then hapless Social Security Minister, talking about direct payments to lenders, said that that would be "a tighter requirement" than the Government wanted. Since the present Prime Minister, the leader of the property-owning democracy, said those words, 100,000 additional families have had their homes repossessed. We always bandy statistics around in the Chamber, but it is worth rolling that one round again—100,000.

Before 1986, mortgage interest payments were available from the beginning of the claim. We are talking about whether we should put back the other half of the payments that are now missing from the first 16 weeks. In 1986, the cost in the first 16 weeks and thereafter was met. The change was deliberately introduced by the Prime Minister, who was then a Social Security Minister. He introduced the rule that cut the permissible pay-out in half for the first four months of the claim, so that thousands more people were plunged into mortgage debt.

The then Social Security Minister said that repossessions would not happen. The Labour party and the building societies warned him of the results of that policy, but he pressed ahead with exactly the wrong measure at exactly the wrong time. It was the same sort of Mr. Magoo decision-making that has characterised his leading us ever deeper into recession. I know that he cannot help not being up to the job, but that is of little consolation to people who have lost their homes or jobs, or been made bankrupt by the Government's policies.

A number of effective, imaginative and creative schemes exist that could help people. We need a change of Government to ensure that those schemes are put to work.

12.22 am

The Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Listening to Opposition Members tonight, one would imagine that the position was entirely that of gloom and doom. I do not deny the miseries that we are seeking to alleviate through the measure, but as the Opposition appear to have a vested political interest in making everyone believe that matters cannot and are not getting better, and there is no ray of light for those who

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

own their own homes, I shall direct Opposition Members to an article in the "Money Mail" section of today's *Daily Mail.* The article quotes the very building societies about which the Opposition have been challenging us tonight. The Opposition wanted us to say what progress those societies had been making.

Opposition Members seem to associate progress against repossessions with a narrow package of mortgage rescue schemes, but what matters is that building societies and lenders take measures to reduce repossessions in whatever way they see fit as a result of our introducing the provisions. The societies and lenders do not have to use any one route.

One large building society has said that, already—this is not in the future—nine out of 10 of its arrears cases have come to some form of arrangement with it. Another has said that rather than making loans to housing associations at a soft rate, it would prefer to renegotiate packages with the borrowers themselves at levels that they can afford.

We also read in "Money Mail" today that the Woolwich repossessed 15 per cent. fewer properties in the second six months of 1991. The Abbey National says that short-term arrears are in decline and repossessions are either stable or falling off, not increasing. Cheltenham and Gloucester has fewer short-term arrears and repossessed fewer properties in the second half of 1991. The Halifax says that short-term arrears and repossessions are in decline.

Dr. Kumar *rose*——

Miss Widdecombe: I will give way in a moment. Figures from the Council of Mortgage Lenders to be released at the end of next week will show that there were some 80,000 repossessions for 1991, which is much better than the 100,000 which were predicted.

I should like to address the points made by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who quoted a figure of 10,000 from Phillips and Drew. That figure referred simply to the package which is before the House. He did not take into account the package which we announced before Christmas. On the basis of that estimate, Phillips and Drew says that some 45,000 repossessions will be favourably affected.

The view of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire about the number of repossessions is not shared by the Council of Mortgage Lenders. He said that the package will have very little effect. Whereas the Council of Mortgage Lenders was predicting 80,000 repossessions before, it says that as a result of this package it may be able to prevent 40,000.

May I turn a question round to the Opposition?

Dr. Kumar *rose*——

Miss Widdecombe: In a minute; I have remembered the hon. Gentleman.

All evening, the Opposition have been saying that we cannot give figures for how many people will be affected. If the Council of Mortgage Lenders is telling us, as it has been, that there is a potential to save 40,000 repossessions, and we had done nothing about it and said that we could not measure the effect, would not the Opposition have been the first to say that we should have been listening to what was being said?

Mr. Kirkwood *rose*——

Miss Widdecombe: I will give way to the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) first, because I promised to do so.

Dr. Kumar: If the figures for the building societies are as stated, why do we not see the result in local authorities? The number of people becoming homeless is still increasing in Middlesbrough and Langbaurgh when it should be declining. If the case that the Minister argues so vociferously is right, it should be translated into that.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman is completely confusing repossession with the larger question of homelessness. The figures that I have given are those of the building societies.

As to the interesting and expensive speech of the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), I want to be quite clear about what he promised. It was that the Labour party, in the unlikely event of its ever being in a position to do so, would abolish the 50 per cent. rule for the first 16 weeks and would pay 100 per cent. right from the start. In other words, he would pay for some 40,000 applicants at an average of £34 a week. That was a pledge, we were told. Is it an immediate pledge? I will be happy to give way if he will tell us. Is this to be done on day one, year one, Parliament one? Do we know?

The hon. Gentleman urged us to extend our help with mortgage payments to those on low incomes, not on income support. He did not even restrict help to those on family credit, if I understood his speech correctly. Is the Labour party promising to do that? How much would it cost? We reckon that, if we extended it just to those on family credit, it would come to some half a billion pounds.

Mr. Allen: Will the hon. Lady tell us how much it is costing for bed and breakfast for all the people who have had their homes taken from them?

Miss Widdecombe: If Opposition Members distribute pledges, they must put a price on them. Is the hon. Gentleman claiming that he would effect savings on bed and breakfast by abolishing the provision?

Mr. Allen: The hon. Lady seems to be practising for life in opposition already. She should remember that for at least the next eight weeks she will still be a Minister. The costs of bed-and-breakfast accommodation should be available to her and the Government. Perhaps she will give us the figures. The figures for future expenditure will become available as and when the expenditure is incurred. This expenditure, caused by the Government's incompetence having forced people into repossession of their homes and hence into bed-and-breakfast accommodation, is taking place now. So what are the figures?

Miss Widdecombe: Bed-and-breakfast accommodation is not restricted to repossession cases. We are discussing repossessions. We are discussing what Labour proposes. Opposition Members have consistently said that we have caused a lot of misery by our income support rates. I want to know: by how much Labour would raise those rates; when they will raise them; and whether this is a pledge or a priority.

The 16-week restriction has given rise to one of the major criticisms levelled at our policy. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) repeated the fabrication that when the Prime Minister was Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for social security he caused or contributed to the problem of repossessions by introducing this rule. But we were told at the time, in writing, by the Council of Mortgage Lenders that that rule would not be a cause of repossession and that it saw no reason for anyone to leave home as a result of it. We have been told the same since.

So the answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire is that introducing 100 per cent. from day one would make no difference—this is not a cause of repossessions.

We must strike a balance between the use of taxpayers' money to help people to acquire assets and the people's need to keep a roof over their heads. We have therefore struck that balance. There is no effect on repossessions that we can measure, or that the Council of Mortgage Lenders will admit to, so——

Mr. Allen: On 19 December 1991, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) quoted a statement by the Building Societies Association in 1986, as follows:

> "Building societies regret that the government has decided to limit assistance which unemployed owner-occupiers receive through supplementary benefit".—*[Official Report, 19 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 463.]*

Miss Widdecombe: For the second time running, the hon. Gentleman has quoted only the first part of that statement. Immediately following that quotation, the association continued:

> "Societies will do all they can to help people where benefit is restricted, and there is no reason to expect that people will lose their homes as a result of this measure."

The hon. Gentleman should quote in full, or not at all. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already put the hon. Gentleman right on this point, so either he is insulting the House by making the same point again when he knows the truth, or he is hoping that we have even shorter memories than he has.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North mentioned what he called the diversion of £350 million to building societies. That was no diversion: the money was always intended for the lenders in the first place. There is no question of their having made what the hon. Gentleman called a nice little earner. They were supposed to receive the money; indeed, that was the only reason why it was handed over at all.

The next question concerns multiple deductions. As was said earlier, the Bill does not affect multiple deductions because those are taken, as the hon. Member for Nottingham, North agreed, from basic income support. These deductions will be taken only from the amount of income support which was calculated for mortgages.

From the talk tonight, one would have imagined that there were not already ceilings and limits on direct deductions. There are. We should remember that the sums made over in income support include an amount for community charge and an amount for ordinary living expenses, and that they should, therefore, be used for this purpose. When social fund loans deductions which are on top of the 15 per cent. ceiling are made, they are flexible and negotiable. Often—*[Interruption.]* The problem with Opposition Members is that they do not talk to enough local offices. Often people have large numbers of social fund loans simultaneously, but they are paying off only one at a time. I can tell the hon. Member for Nottingham, North that the problem is well addressed.

I sum up——

Mr. Kirkwood: The Minister is making heavy weather of the point. Has she any estimate for the House of the repossessions that will be saved as a direct result of the Bill?

Miss Widdecombe: All we have are the estimates of the Council of Mortgage Lenders. As I have said, we are responding to that body. If we had not responded to the estimate that we could save that number of repossessions, we should have been heavily criticised at the time. We have the latest forecast that the package, in addition to the package that we introduced before Christmas, together with the measures being taken by building societies, could save 40,000. With the measures only having been announced in November, it is too early to say precisely how many will be saved.

We have responded to the request of the lenders. We have done our best to ensure that money is going where it should go. We have got, in return, an agreement from lenders to limit repossessions, some of the results of which I gave earlier. The Bill is a humane and welcome measure. Opposition Members, although they do not oppose it, have not the courage to welcome it and to praise it as it deserves.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Further proceedings postponed, pursuant to Order [3 February.]

SOCIAL SECURITY (MORTGAGE INTEREST PAYMENTS) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any administrative expenses incurred by a Minister of the Crown in consequence of that Act; and

(b) the making of payments into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill

Immediately considered in Committee, pursuant to Order [3 February]

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 1

REPORT TO PARLIAMENT

"The Secretary of State shall at six-monthly intervals lay before Parliament a report on the operation of the scheme authorised by this Act.".—*[Mr. Bradley.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): I beg to move, that the clause be read a Second time.

I will be brief, because I am sure, from Ministers' contributions to the Second Reading debate, that the Government will welcome the new clause. All we seek through it is the opportunity for the Secretary of State to report to the House on a six-monthly basis on the workings of the Bill, which will then be an Act.

From what the Under-Secretary of State said, it is clear that, although the time has not yet elapsed by which the Government can give a sufficient consideration of the consequences of the Bill, they will be able to do so in due course. The Secretary of State will be able to report and to give us the details that we have been seeking tonight about how many repossessions have been avoided because of the Bill. He could perhaps widen the report and give details of the rescue schemes that have finally been put in place with the building societies, say how they are operating in practice, how many people are included in them, what is their cost, what is their rental element and how much housing benefit is being paid on the affordable rents that I hope will be introduced under them.

The new clause would give us an excellent opportunity to return to the subject to determine whether the Bill's effects have alleviated the desperate plight of those suffering under the threat of repossession. I hope that, in view of the spirit in which I have moved the new clause, it will be welcomed and accepted by the Government.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I shall be equally brief. I cannot respond positively to the new clause, although I have some sympathy with it. I hope that, over the time that I have been involved in social security, I have proved that we are anxious to monitor and report back to the House regularly on what happens with our legislation. There are sufficient opportunities open to hon. Members, let alone Front-Bench spokesmen, through Adjournment debates, questions, written questions, and so on, to ask the Government to produce the figures on the implementation of any policy—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Carry on.

Mr. Scott: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

To produce, at considerable expense and complication, the sort of figures for which the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) asked on a six-monthly basis would be excessive. The Government have no intention to disguise or shield from the House the effects of any policy we introduce, least of all this one. We stand ready to produce, as requested by the House, the figures on the implementation of our policy and its effects. I cannot believe that it would be sensible to compel this or any successor Government to produce——

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): To save making a speech, may I ask the Minister a simple question? If he is not prepared to produce a six-monthly report, can he assure us that the statutory instruments that will follow from this primary legislation will be under the affirmative rather than the negative procedure?

Mr. Scott: The Bill is not a mere enabling Bill—it is properly a Bill that includes most of the effects of the regulations. It is more appropriate that the regulations should be under the negative procedure, but it is open to the Opposition to pray against them and to have them discussed, if that is what they wish. There are ample opportunities for hon. Members on both sides of the House, if they wish to check the implementation of the Bill, to have it discussed openly in the House. I do not believe that the measure being advocated by the hon. Member for Withington is sensible.

Mr. Bradley: The Minister's reply was disappointing. We cannot help but be concerned that, because the Government are not prepared to report back to the House, they may have more to hide than they are suggesting tonight. I assure the House that we shall rigorously pursue every possible avenue to seek the necessary information. Although we are often hindered in that task, I am sure that all my hon. Friends will use every device possible to ensure that the consequences of the Bill and the real statistics that we are seeking from the Government—not comments from "Money Mail" or the Council of Mortgage Lenders —will tell us exactly what is happening with mortgage repossessions as a consequence of the Bill.

In the light of the Government's assurance of rigorous pursuit in this matter, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Tees and Hartlepool

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

12.45 am

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is appropriate that we should adjourn the House on a short debate on the operation of the Ports Act 1991. Only last week, the Secretary of State for Transport endorsed the privatisation of the first trust port in accordance with the powers granted to him by the Act.

The legislation privatising trust ports is unlike a great deal of other Conservative legislation in past years, in which the Government sought to avoid responsibility. The fingerprints of the Secretary of State for Transport may be found all over the Ports Act. Not only does he oversee the sale of the ports, laying down conditions; he also makes the final decision on criteria set down by this Department.

It has always struck me as curious that, as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)—I have heard a variety of speehes from him—used to have to tootle along to see the Chancellor of the Exchequer for money for Jaguar, while feeling that the decisions involved were commercial decisions on investment, more appropriate to business men. In the case of the Ports Act, the Secretary of State bears on his shoulders a series of duties for which he is held accountable to the House.

We know that the Act came into force because the Treasury saw a variety of pots of gold dotted around the country in our trust ports. Section 13 makes that clear when it talks of levy on initial disposals of securities of successor companies. In short, half the pot of gold in each port would go to the Treasury; the other half would go back into the successor company.

If the Treasury had its eye on the pots of gold, however, so did other predators. When the successor company to Tees and Hartlepool, Teesside Holdings, took over the port, it immediately picked up the £35 million cash asset that was standing in the bank, in the port's name, at the time of the takeover.

Whatever arguments may be advanced about the first privatisation of a trust port—and there are many—the fact is that, of a purchase price of £180 million, with £90 million going to the Treasury and with cash to the tune of £35 million in the Treasury, not to mention a pension fund with some £38 million in the bank, Teesside Holdings has paid no more than £55 million for assets worth £180 million. Opposition Members feel that that constitutes naked capitalism of the worst kind on the part of this Conservative Government—capitalism at its most blatant. It is cynical; it deprives a local community of its port; and it is immoral.

When deciding to endorse the bid of Teesside Holdings, in his written response to a planted parliamentary question, the Secretary of State for Transport said that he had considered representations about Humberside Holdings and other companies associated with the Holloway family. He was required to do so because Humberside Holdings is one of a trio of companies in the consortium that became the successful bidder for the port of Tees and Hartlepool.

The Secretary of State made the following statement about John Holloway, who was intended to be chief executive of Tees and Hartlepool port authority:

> "I have found nothing in the evidence put before me concerning either Mr. John Holloway or Humberside Holdings which would make it proper for me to withhold my consent to the proposed sale to Teesside Holdings Ltd."—[*Official Report,* 28 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. *501.*]

Mr. Kevin Fletcher, a solicitor on Teesside, who advised the Tees and Hartlepool board on the sale, advised me that the backgrounds of all the bidders were fully taken into account. Nor can the Secretary of State claim ignorance, for I gave his Department a full file on matters surrounding both the Holloway family and its associate companies.

This is important, because one of the criteria which was laid down by the Secretary of State in accordance with the Ports Act, and to which he alluded in his parliamentary response, was the fitness of the bidders to run the port. The Secretary of State was quite right not to take into account the past criminal records of Douglas and Barry Holloway, nor did I ask that he should. We know from newspaper reports that Douglas Holloway was convicted in November 1980 of bribing officials at the Scunthorpe works of British Steel with two of his directors, including his son Barry. He was fined £11,000 with £10,000 costs, and given a 12-month suspended sentence. Barry Holloway was fined £1,500, received a six-month suspended sentence and was gaoled for seven days for contempt of court. John Holloway was charged and acquitted and, by way of explanation of how he found himself in the dock in the first place, he said that he had just left school at the time.

Both Douglas and Barry Holloway were on the board of Humberside Holdings throughout the bidding process for the port of Tees and Hartlepool. They promptly resigned on 21 December when facts of their criminal records became known to the public. Mr. W. G. Andrews, who is now the non-executive chairman of the new board of Tees and Hartlepool, indicated, when asked, that he thought that the Holloways had paid their debts to society. As it happens, it turns out that society, on both sides of the Atlantic, paid their debts for them.

As the Secretary of State for Transport knew when he made his first decision under the Ports Act, the most significant company in the Holloway group was Interdom. That company went into liquidation on 15 November 1991, during the bidding process, with a summary of liabilities to non-preferential creditors in the amount of £1,740,000, and an estimated total deficiency, as regards members, of £2,240,527. Those directors listed as holding office during the last three years were Douglas Holloway, Barry Holloway and John Holloway, all of whom were involved in the bid for the port of Tees and Hartlepool. As I have already said, John Holloway is now the new chief executive.

A full file on Interdom Ltd. was submitted by Ernst and Young to the Department of Trade and Industry, marked "Private and Confidential" and dated 29 November 1991—this at the very time that the former non-executive board was debating the credentials of the bidders. The Secretary of State for Transport was aware of this when he satisfied himself that Mr. John Holloway was a fit and proper person to run a port. Thus, while he was making that decision, the Department of Trade and Industry was considering a file submitted by the receivers on the selfsame people. The Secretary of State knew that when he

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

decided that Humberside Holdings, with the same Holloway shareholders, was also composed of fit and proper persons.

Nor could it be said, when it came to receivership, that the Holloways were respecters of particular creditors or persons. Thus, American Express found itself owed £50·15. Arthur Anderson was owed £57,542. Mercury Carphones was also owed money. That is an interesting thought for you, Madam Deputy Speaker: running a port without car phones. One can imagine the Holloways being unable to phone back and forth because, when their company went into receivership, they owed Mercury £827·72. Nevertheless, the Secretary of State concluded that they were fit and proper people to run the port of Tees and Hartlepool.

There is a significant statement appended to the file sent to the Department of Trade and Industry, to the effect that, prior to the receivership date, the company had a credit balance of £1,658,817. That amount had been set off against the bank borrowings of other group companies by the company's bankers, pursuant to their security. The offsetting arrangement has, according to the statement on file at the Department of Trade and Industry, created

"inter-company balances with other group companies which are also in receivership and the balances are not therefore recoverable."

"Other companies in receivership"—but the Secretary of State declared in his written response that he had considered the record of the bidding company and satisfied himself, or words to that effect, that it was fit and proper to run the port of Tees and Hartlepool. In fact, the receivership of Interdom and other group companies referred to in the file submitted to the Department of Trade and Industry is only the last in a long line which looks like a trail of broken dreams and promises—rather like the tragic James Dean posters that one sees from time to time.

Lindsey Dock Services Ltd. and John Sutcliffe Consolidated Stevedores Ltd. were associate companies of Humberside Holdings Ltd. The holding of Humberside Holdings Ltd. in Lindsey Dock Services Ltd. amounted to 50 per cent. and, in the case of John Sutcliffe Consolidated Stevedores Ltd. to 33 per cent. John Holloway and Frederick Russel Brown were directors of Lindsey Dock Services Ltd. as well as directors of Humberside Holdings Ltd.

I shall return to Frederick Russel Brown in a moment, because he is a director of the new Tees and Hartlepool port and will work in an executive capacity alongside John Holloway. Both companies of which they were directors went into liquidation, leaving the Government to pick up the bill for redundancy payments to stevedores amounting in the case of Lindsey Dock Services Ltd. to £3,340,001 and in the case of John Sutcliffe Consolidated Stevedores Ltd. to £3,598,314.

Let us look across the Atlantic. Interdom owned a company in the United States called Contract Marine Carriers Inc. with head offices in Richmond, Virginia. Douglas Holloway was listed as one of the officers—in fact, he was listed as chairman and president. The chief accountant was Mr. Frederick Brown who, as I said, is now to run the port of Tees and Hartlepool in accordance with the decision of the Secretary of State in the discharge of his duties under the Ports Act 1991. When Contract Marine Carriers Inc. went into involuntary bankruptcy, Interdom Holdings Ltd. was the principal shareholder.

Just prior to the involuntary bankruptcy, moneys amounting to $172,250 which rightly belonged to the creditors were transferred from the Sovran bank, Richmond, Virginia to the National Westminster bank, 52 Threadneedle street, London, and to the Hungarian International bank, Princess house, 95 Gresham street, London EC2. Those concerned with the transfers were Douglas Holloway and Interdom Ltd., of which Mr. John Holloway was a founding shareholder and director.

When an attorney representing the creditors in the United States—Mr. C. Thomas Green III—sent a letter to the company, a reply was sent by McHale and Co. denying that Interdom Holdings Ltd. was or had ever been a shareholder in Contract Marine Carriers Inc. A search at Companies house revealed that, although Contract Marine Carriers (UK) Ltd. was registered, as was Contract Marine Carriers (Garston) Ltd., there was no reference to Contract Marine Carriers Ltd. in the United States. In the end, Mr. Douglas Holloway accepted responsibility for the company in a letter dated 3 April 1986.

So we see the link between a company in the United States—Contract Marine Carriers Inc.—and Douglas Holloway; through Mr. Holloway to Humberside; through Humberside to Interdom; and from Interdom, through Humberside again, into the consortium, and from that consortium to the new company created under the Ports Act.

We come again to Mr. Fred Brown. Not only was he listed as chief accountant, but—between 20 and 29 January 1986, shortly before Contract Marine Carriers Inc. ceased trading, because of the involuntary bankruptcy—he went to Richmond, Virginia. One of the reasons given for the involuntary bankruptcy of the American company was that the revenue was being collected abroad, and debts were not being paid in the United States. In short, the money owed directly to the company was being funnelled off to the United Kingdom.

There was also serious doubt whether the company was properly registered in the United States in accordance with the Jones Act. There were violations not only of United States law but of United Kingdom law, because the company was not registered as one of the companies in the Interdom group.

What do we see when the Secretary of State for Transport has made the first decision? We see that two directors involved in two companies that have gone into receivership are now to run the port of Tees and Hartlepool—at a time when the associate company was not only in liquidation but had been referred to the Department of Trade and Industry.

It is my full intention to call for the disqualification of the directors Fred Brown and John Holloway in accordance with the Company Directors Disqualification Act, 1986, and to submit a full file to the Department of Trade and Industry, calling for it to take action in the public interest. A disqualification order under section 8 of that Act should be made.

The reason for my decision is the inability of the Secretary of State for Transport to look the facts fully in the face and to act upon them in accordance with his duties under the Ports Act. I shall submit the file because, in my view, there is prima facie evidence of a breach of commercial morality, of gross incompetence and of recklessness. There is evidence, too, that the two directors are not fit and proper persons, and are not competent to run the port of Tees and Hartlepool.

Other factors, too, make me determined to take the matter a stage further. Six and a half million pounds of taxpayers' money has never been seen again; it was paid to stevedores so that two companies could go into liquidation and then set up in business again. The law takes a dim view of such a situation—rather more so, apparently, than does the Secretary of State for Transport.

According to the law, the amount of Crown debt is an important factor in determining unfitness. I have already mentioned the £6·5 million of Crown debts owed by the two companies, which the Department of Transport has been unable to recover because of the massive debts that the companies have run up, and their inability to meet any of them.

The number of liquidations that directors have been involved in is a relevant factor, too. It is no coincidence or accident that Fred Brown and John Holloway have been involved in previous liquidations, nor that John Holloway was a founding member of Interdom Ltd., and retired, or resigned, from the firm in May when he saw that the writing was on the wall. However, he is listed in the DTI file as a director for the past three years.

The way in which the companies have been managed in the past is another significant reason why the matter should be referred to the DTI with a view to having those two directors disqualified.

I have already referred to the issue of morality. We see here the confluence of Government immorality and bad legislation.

After 13 years, the Tory Government have no sense of morality and no sense of what is due to the taxpayer. We hear so much about Labour's tax policy, yet £6·5 million of my money, your money, Madam Deputy Speaker, the money of other hon. Members and the money of those who live in our country has simply been given away to firms and individuals who, as I have shown tonight, have lined up a whole series of liquidations in the United States and in this country.

We have seen incredulity on the part of the 15 trust ports of our land, which were lining themselves up for management-employee buy-outs only to shelve their plans. The ports of Tyne and of Ipswich have no further interest in privatisation. After two years, the Government's ports policy is totally incoherent.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Langbaurgh): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State has delivered a kick in the teeth to the people of Cleveland and Cleveland Members who lobbied him, pointing out his errors at different times?

Mr. Bell: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We saw the Secretary of State and he said, "I hear what you say," but he did not act upon what he heard.

We have seen immorality, bad legislation and a privatisation too far and we have seen—to paraphrase "Gone with the Wind"—that the Tories don't give a damn about Teesside.

1.5 am

The Minister for Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): In the short time that is left, I shall attempt to answer some of the points that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) has made. I will not be able to answer them all.

The hon. Gentleman said that the operation of the Ports Act 1991 is in some chaos, and I shall come to that matter a little later.

The hon. Gentleman said that we had not fully considered his representations. I can assure him that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State considered in great detail all the representations that were made. That is why a considerable time elapsed between his original statement that he was minded to accept and the announcement of the final decision to give the go-ahead. Any complaints that were made to us were taken seriously.

We have heard on numerous occasions that the only reason why the Government wanted the Ports Act on the statute book was that they wanted the money. That allegation has just been made again. Had that been our sole concern, we would have accepted the highest bid. The simple fact was that a recommendation was made to us by the Tees and Hartlepool port authority and the Secretary of State accepted it.

We all know that Labour Members have consistently opposed all the measures that we have taken to free up the docks industry. Tonight they have yet again shown their total objection to any privatisation that gives opportunities to the people who work in the industry concerned. Such privatisations are anathema to the Opposition.

The enactment of the Ports Act was the latest stage in a process of deregulating the port industry. The abolition of the dock labour scheme did much for the THPA, freeing it from the constraints from which it had suffered for many years. The repeal of the dock labour scheme provisions was consistently opposed by the Opposition.

We believe that it is essential to have a competitive industry in which individual ports compete with each other for business in the marketplace. We believe that the right place for the larger trust ports is the private sector. As company ports, they will be able to compete on equal terms with the part of the ports industry that already lies in the private sector and which, by tonnage, already amounts to more than 50 per cent. of the industry. They will no longer be bound by the unnecessary constraints on their activities that their status as trust ports brings.

My right hon. and learned Friend delayed making his final decision on the sale of THPA until he had looked into the various matters that Opposition Members had raised about the sale. On 28 January, he announced that he had not found anything in the points raised that would justify him in not confirming his consent to the recommendation that the THPA board had made to him that the port should be sold to Teesside Holdings Ltd. This statement ended a period of uncertainty for the port which had the potential for doing real damage to the port itself. It was important that that period of uncertainty should be ended and I am sorry that Opposition Members seem to want to reopen the whole subject and to renew that uncertainty——

Dr. Kumar *rose*——

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sorry, but I do not have the time to give way because I have not been left with enough time to reply. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

That is not and cannot be good for the port or the area that is serves. A few moments ago, I noticed my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker)

[Mr. McLoughlin]

nodding his head in agreement, because that is exactly what the Opposition intend—to continue that uncertainty. That is disgraceful from any elected representative.

Dr. Kumar *rose*——

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sorry, but I do not have time to give way.

The record of those earlier debates shows that the hon. Member for Middlesbrough's concern about the Act naturally centre upon the privatisation of the Tees and Hartlepool authority, as he has demonstrated this evening. Now that that privatisation has actually taken place, I am wondering whether this will be his swan song, or whether he will continue to take such a lively interest in the Act.

The hon. Gentleman's views on the Tees and Hartlepool port authority have not always been clear or consistent. During the debates in 1990 in this House on the authority's own Bill for privatising its undertaking, he was happy enough to denigrate the authority for having the temerity to be seeking privatisation at all. He was even more ready to attack the management for even thinking of buying the port. During the earlier stages of the passage of the Ports Act 1991, he was virtually silent on the question of management-employee buy-outs—perhaps he was undergoing some sort of fundamental change of heart and could not reconcile the way in which he had stopped the original private Bill from proceeding in the House.

By the later stages of the Bill, and particularly during this House's consideration of the amendments that were made in another place, the hon. Gentleman had become eloquent in favour of a management-employee buy-out for the Tees and Hartlepool port authority, primarily, as he suggested, to protect the port from outsiders, who might even be foreign. Possibly the most consistent aspect of his approach—if this can be called "consistency"—has been to try to attack and undermine whenever possible the decisions of the authority, obstruct its privatisation at every turn, and to make that privatisation as uncertain, costly and damaging a business as he could.

The motto of the hon. Member's policy might perhaps have been that it was necessary to destroy the authority in order to save it from privatisation. That would be an approach typical of a party that values entrenched positions and the status quo so much that, in the unlikely event of the Opposition winning the next election, they would probably reintroduce the dock labour scheme and reimpose on the ports industry the shackles from which it has just been released. By contrast, the Government have done a lot for our ports industry. My right hon. and learned Friend's announcement on 28 January will enable the THPA to embark on a period of development and expansion under its new owners.

Looking ahead to other trust port privatisations which are currently in progress, we continue to see the use of a range of objectives of sale as criteria against which the final bids are to be evaluated as being the best way of enabling each trust port authority to assess the competing bids that it receives, and to take into account, alongside the price offered, its concern about the future of its port.

As I have said, the Opposition frequently accused the Government during the debates on the Ports Act of recognising no other criterion for port sales except the price paid. That was untrue. We said at the time that we were prepared to consider other objectives apart from the price if those were of importance to individual ports, and that is what has happened in this case. It is an approach to privatisation that gives each individual port authority considerable flexibility and control over its own privatisation, a situation which I would have thought was welcome to both sides of the House, given the views that were expressed during debates on the Act. The port authority is the vendor in the sale of each port, and it must be for each bidder to convince the authority's board that his bid meets the objectives of the sale as completely as possible and more fully than any of his competitors' bids.

I reject most emphatically the attacks on the ports privatisation programme that the hon. Gentleman has made both in the media and in this House.

I turn now to the progress that has already been made, since the Bill became law last July. One trust port—Tees and Hartlepool—has now completed its privatisation, and no fewer than four others—Medway, Clyde, Forth and Tilbury—have begun the process. I remind hon. Members that they comprise five out of the country's eight largest trust ports. Those developments clearly show that our assessment of the need for Government legislation to enable the trust ports to enter the private sector was right. The privatisation programme resulting from the Ports Act remains firmly on target.

By contrast, we know that, under a Labour Government, the trust ports would have no such opportunity. Not only that, but they would still be saddled with the enormous dead weight of the dock labour scheme, constantly draining away their resources and their competitiveness to no purpose. That is why this Government's long-term strategy for the ports industry is the better road for that industry to take, and why the trust ports privatisation programme, under the successful operation of the Ports Act, is an essential part of that strategy.

Having thoroughly scrutinised all the bids, the Tees and Hartlepool port authority board decided to recommend to my right hon. and learned Friend——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at fifteen minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) Bill *(By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read a Third time on Thursday 13 February.

Alliance and Leicester (Girobank) Bill *(By Order)*

British Railways (No. 4) Bill *(By Order)*

Crossrail Bill *(By Order)*

East Coast Main Line Safety Bill *(By Order)*

King's Cross Railways (No. 2) Bill *(By Order)*

London Docklands Railway (Lewisham, etc.) (No. 2) Bill *(By Order)*

London Underground (Green Park) Bill *(By Order)*

London Underground (Jubilee) Bill *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 13 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Nutritional Supplements

1. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking on proposals for new EC legislation or regulations on nutritional supplements; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): We are currently consulting all the interests concerned on a Commission discussion paper on possible controls. Our response to the Commission's paper will be formulated in the light of that detailed consultation.

Mr. Canavan: Is the Minister aware of the continuing concern among natural health therapists and others about the inadequate consultation so far by the Government on this important matter and of the allegations of serious omissions and inaccuracies in the Denner report, which was supposed to be based on previous consultations? In view of the fears expressed about the possibility of serious restrictions being placed on the availability of certain nutritional supplements as a result of the new EC regulations, will the Minister give us an assurance that the Government will conduct far wider and genuine consultations on the discussion paper that has been produced by the European Commission?

Mr. Maclean: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we conducted wide discussions on Dr. Denner's excellent report which was the basis for consultation. We consulted more than 160 separate organisations on that. We now have an EC discussion paper and we shall consult all those organisations as well. Everyone—and anyone—is invited to make representations to us. I urge people to talk to us as quickly as possible so that we can have meaningful discussions in the EC. We shall continue to consult organisations as the negotiations progress.

Mr. Ashby: Is not the problem for my hon. Friend that there are so many diverse views on nutritional supplements that it is hard to know from which set of experts one should take advice? From which set of experts will he take advice in this respect? Will it be the organised medical practitioners as we know them today or those who are practising in the area? Their views are as relevant as anyone's.

Mr. Maclean: I accept that many experts have a relevant view here. Let me state a couple of fundamental principles that we hold dear. We believe that anyone who wants to buy mineral pills or vitamin supplements has the right to buy them, provided that they are safe. On the other hand, I strongly believe that if people consume a normal, adequate and balanced diet, they should receive almost all the vitamins that they need, unless they are under doctor's orders. As I said to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), we shall consult widely all the various interests and, no doubt, other European countries will receive representations from manufacturers, from users and from suppliers.

Agricultural Employment

2. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about levels of employment within the agricultural industry.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): The 1991 census of agricultural holdings showed that the number employed in agriculture in June 1991 was 628,000, a decline of 2 per cent. from June 1990.

Mr. Eadie: I thank the Minister for the information that he has given the House. Does he agree that farmers and farmworkers are the backbone of rural communities? Is he aware that this year their numbers have declined by about 9,000? Is the Minister also aware that, in my area of Lothian, since the Government gained office, roughly one third of farmworkers have lost their jobs? Will the hon. Gentleman tell us what he proposes to do about that?

Mr. Curry: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recognises that increasing productivity in agriculture has been a feature in the past, both in good years and in bad. Employment has gone down only 11 per cent. in 10 years and a great deal of that is due to higher productivity. The hon. Gentleman asked what we would do about that fall in employment. The first thing we must do is to defeat the MacSharry proposals that target British farm workers, and particularly those relating to sheepmeat, which represent a direct attack on those who work in British agriculture—not merely those who own or rent farms but those employed on them. That is our first priority.

Sir Jim Spicer: Does not my hon. Friend agree that the whole thrust of the proposals, as they are currently based, directly discriminates against efficiency? Will he undertake that when he and my right hon. Friend the Minister go to Brussels next week for that crucial meeting, they will continue to fight for British agriculture as a whole and not bend over backwards to please MacSharry, as the Opposition would do?

Mr. Curry: I give my hon. Friend that pledge with a great deal of enthusiasm. We have always fought for all the people employed in British agriculture, whatever their status. It is particularly important that we have the support of everyone in the House. We must recognise that many people who earn relatively modest wages and who are essential to the rural economy will be the first to be put at risk by those proposals. We will fight them.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Can the Minister explain why 10,000 full-time farmers left the land last year? There is no point in blaming MacSharry, because that happened last year.

Mr. Curry: It has been happening all the time and, with respect to the hon. Gentleman, it has been happening constantly. Even in the best years for agriculture, people have been leaving the land because the trend is towards larger units, maximising productivity and getting the best out of the work force. I cannot stand here and guarantee that we can halt that long-term consolidation of holdings in agriculture. No Minister in the European Community could do that. We will do our best to ensure that we maintain a sensible, profitable structure for agriculture in the United Kingdom in the interests of all those employed by it and involved in it.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend accept that with falling net incomes, particularly in the hills, and diminishing employment prospects, everyone on the Conservative Benches wishes him well for the negotiations in Europe? We cannot possibly accept the MacSharry proposals as they stand because they discriminate against British farming more than anything else.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend and I have spelt that that out categorically in meeting after meeting. We shall continue to do that until Mr. MacSharry understands it.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Minister appreciate that, today, 25 farm workers will lose their jobs and 14 farmers will be forced off the land? Does he appreciate that for every single day that he and his right hon. Friend have been in office in Whitehall place, we have similarly lost 25 farm workers and 14 farmers? Have they no conscience about that? Do they not feel any personal responsibility? It is simply not good enough to blame MacSharry, because his proposals, bad as they are, have not yet affected British agriculture.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman would know if he had addressed as many farmers' organisations as I have that the first question farmers ask is how we can deal with the uncertainty of the MacSharry proposals, which now confront us. We know that there are other uncertainties, such as GATT, which represents an equally difficult problem. What happens eventually in eastern Europe will also present just as much difficulty for our farmers.

Our first task is to remove the uncertainties with which we can deal, and the first of those are the proposals of Mr. MacSharry. Until we have dealt with that, there will not be the certainty in the industry which will give people the confidence they need to invest. Otherwise we shall see a continuing decline over and above that which increased productivity would normally dictate.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

3. **Mr. Boscawen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the planned expansion of environmentally sensitive areas.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): In my statement to the House of 15 January, I explained the steps that I had taken to improve the first five environmentally sensitive areas designated in 1987, my plans for reviewing this year those ESAs designated in 1988, including any boundary adjustments, and my timetable for designating a further 12 areas this year and in 1993.

Mr. Boscawen: Will my right hon. Friend accept that the new, enhanced payments for those who take up ESAs and the improvements in the scheme are widely welcomed by the farmers concerned? Does he agree that the scheme must remain voluntary if it is to retain its value? Will he, if it remains voluntary, reassure farmers who would like to take up the scheme that the payments will not be reduced during the period for which they take it up—that is, for five or even 10 years? Does he appreciate that the great advantage of the scheme in the Somerset Levels, which I represent and where I live, is that all parties interested in the conservation of the wildlife and landscape of the area are sitting down and talking together? That represents a great advance and we believe that, in the long term, something valuable will come of that.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has put his finger on a major advantage of the situation, which is that conservationists and farmers in environmentally sensitive areas are learning to work together. I hope that the changes in the Somerset Levels will do a great deal to ensure that the area is much improved for wading birds. We are watching the situation carefully to make sure that that is the effect.

Mr. Dalyell: How much money will be put into the 12 new areas by the Treasury?

Mr. Gummer: As I have announced, total spending will be about £65 million a year. A large amount of new money will go into the new areas. When we have completed the prescriptions, we shall be able to give a detailed account of how much will be spent [illegible] each ESA, so that details of the total amount will be in the public domain.

English Lamb (Hijacking)

4. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times English lamb has been hijacked in France: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Since June 1990, there have been 16 such incidents in France involving British lamb exports.

Mr. Evans: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I congratulate him on his robust stance in defence of British farmers, particularly those producing lamb, in stark contrast to the attitude of Labour Members, who wobble on everything. Indeed, had they been defending British farmers, particularly, those producing lamb, they would have achieved only a load of jelly—and red at that.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has a characteristically robust way of demanding our continued support for British lamb producers. I am sure that he was as pleased as I was that the Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), spent some time last week promoting British lamb in the middle of France. I hope that, as a result, the French will eat a great deal more of our lamb, which is the best in the world.

Mr. John P. Smith: I remind the Minister that we also have some excellent Welsh lamb, much of which comes from my constituency in the Vale of Glamorgan. Is he aware that had the Government encouraged investment in slaughtering facilities, we would not be exporting the jobs that are now being lost?

Mr. Gummer: This is one issue on which the hon. Gentleman might have commenced his supplementary question by saying that most people in Wales are pleased with the way in which the Government have fought for the British lamb industry as a whole and that Welsh consignments have been fought for, too. The hon. Gentleman has been singularly silent in the battle.

Mr. Conway: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we in Britain import more agricultural produce from France than we export to France? Does he agree that it is good that the British farming community is not as violent as appears to be the case on the continent? Does he further agree that that speaks volumes for the decency of the British farming community, which does not react in kind to French imports?

Mr. Gummer: I congratulate the British farming industry on keeping its temper at times when it could easily have boiled over and reciprocated. That has brought a great deal of success, because the French Government are now taking the tough measures that we have been pressing on them for 10 years. That major success is a result of the British farming industry's behaviour.

Meat Labelling

5. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to oblige food companies to label meat according to the method of production.

Mr. Maclean: All food labelling is controlled by the European Commission. Britain cannot unilaterally compel meat companies to show the method of production on the label unless the majority of member states agree.

Mr. Mullin: No, but we can make an effort, can we not, to persuade our European colleagues to join us in that. What effort has the Minister made so far? If he is really concerned about consumer choice and the gross excesses of the factory farming industry, proper labelling is an effective and cheap way to deal with them.

Mr. Maclean: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are committed to a policy of informative labelling. That is why we are following the advice of our independent Food Advisory Committee to explore a voluntary, standardised, humane labelling system. We are actively pursuing that now.

Mr. Hill: Would not the simplest advice to the British public be that they should always buy British beef, pork and veal? There will then be no chance of contamination.

Mr. Maclean: For a whole host of reasons, yes Sir.

Mr. Ron Davies: Why is there such a gulf between the Minister's actions and his words? Are not consumers still being denied freedom of choice, resulting in delays in the introduction of more humane systems of husbandry? Will the Minister confirm that he has no intention of taking meaningful action, but that he is afraid to say so because an election is coming up?

Mr. Maclean: It really is not good enough for a spokesman for the official Opposition to come here in spite, without reading the official report by the independent advisory committee. That report says:

> "We do not recommend a requirement to indicate animal rearing methods on foods labels . . . we therefore recommend that the possibility of drawing up a standard system, which clearly defines terms to indicate welfare-orientated rearing methods, should be considered".

That is what we are actively pursuing.

Meat Inspection

6. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made in determining the future provision of meat inspection services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are currently considering the findings of the recent review of meat hygiene enforcement and will announce their decision as soon as possible.

Mr. Gill: Does my hon. Friend accept the need to harmonise not only the standards but the costs of meat inspection? Why is Great Britain the only country in the Community to impose full economic cost recovery? So long as that situation continues, the British meat and livestock industry will be placed at a severe competitive disadvantage.

Mr. Maclean: Because of the EC directive on the harmonisation of charges, which Britain, as usual, has implemented fairly and expeditiously, the meat inspection regime is not properly harmonised. That is one of the reasons why British inspection costs impose a higher burden on our producers. We must consider that when we look at an alternative structure for the present arrangements for meat hygiene inspection.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Minister aware that, before I came to this place, I served for many years on a local authority as chairman of the environmental health committee, which had a wonderful section for meat inspection? Because the Government and Conservative Members supported the poll tax, local authority meat inspection is in difficulty. Conservative Members should stop appearing before the cameras attacking the Labour party's policies and, instead, start to do their jobs properly, enabling local authorities to provide proper meat inspection facilities in the interests of the community. They should get off their backsides and let us see what they intend to do about it.

Mr. Maclean: As usual, the hon. Gentleman has made an interesting point. However, there is one wee flaw that I shall draw to his attention—all local authorities have full cost recovery on their meat inspection systems. The Government have taken no action to limit the authorities' scope for charging. That is the problem of which my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) spoke; many Labour-controlled local authorities charge way over the oddds.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Is my hon. Friend aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow has raised an urgent and important issue? We have been struggling for years with an inadequate meat hygiene inspection system and we need, as soon as possible, to replace it with a centralised system that will guarantee high standards and uniform costs. I hope that my hon. Friend will give the House a commitment on the timing of that replacement. That change would be in the best interests of the meat industry, the consumer and animal welfare.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend has made a good point. I would defend the system by saying that it is not inadequate in that it certainly guarantees quality and safety in this country, but it leaves much to be desired in that it is diverse and scattered throughout hundreds of different local authorities. The changing EC directives have placed responsibilities on the Government. We are currently considering all viewpoints, and I can assure my hon. Friend that when we are in a position to announce our final decision, we shall do so as speedily as possible.

Poultry Industry

7. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet representatives of the poultry industry to discuss the state of the sector.

Mr. Curry: We have regular meetings with representatives of the poultry industry.

Mr. Wareing: When the Minister next meets representatives of the industry, what will his answer be if they tell him that our poultry meat inspection charges are not subsidised, unlike those of our European Community competitors? That means an extra 4p a pound on poultry meat to British farmers, with the result that 18 per cent. of poultry meat is imported into this country. The disadvantages placed on the industry mean that it costs our farmers 5p a dozen more to produce eggs. Are the Government trying to ruin our industry at a time when 18 per cent. of poultry meat is imported and we have a food trade deficit of more than £6 billion—the worst deficit of any industry in this country?

Mr. Curry: I think that the hon. Gentleman has not quite got his figures right on imports. We are 98 per cent. self-sufficient in poultry meat, although there has been an increase in imports of whole frozen chickens, which have penetrated the market. That happened in 1990, not last year, when the figures were relatively stable. It is true that the industry has to bear some costs. The House will have heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) said about the poultry meat inspection charges. We have to impose charges when dealing with salmonella. It would be irresponsible not to guarantee to the consumer that British products are absolutely safe to eat. I have no doubt that those same consumers, when exercising their choice about what to buy, will want to be absolutely sure that products imported to the United Kingdom have had to undergo precisely the same levels of checks and monitoring as products exported from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend will be aware of concern in the poultry industry about meat inspection. There is a difference in price of 4p a pound in poultry meat due to inspection charges. Will my hon. Friend press the Treasury to sort out the issue of the cost of meat inspection to ensure that the thousands of jobs presently at risk in the poultry industry will be made secure?

Mr. Curry: The complaint about meat inspections in the United Kingdom is that the charges levied by different local authorities vary widely. Some of the overall costs are due to meat inspections, but not all of them. It is important to recognise, too, that there are certain structural problems in the industry; but, above all, we must tackle the problem of the failure of the French to observe the rules effectively and their failure to employ enough inspectors. We have opened discussions with Mr. MacSharry on that, we are pushing the Community for urgency on the zoonoses regulations, and the Commission has before it a proposal to overhaul the meat inspection and meat hygiene directive. We shall push on all those matters in the interests of the United Kingdom poultry industry.

Mr. Salmond: If the Minister holds meetings on the poultry industry, why does not his hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), the

Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, agree to meet me to discuss the case of my constituent Mr. Johnston, a duck producer from Sharnidubs, who has been shabbily treated by the Ministry? Does the Minister understand that the arrogance and insensitivity of his hon. Friend, who has not agreed to a meeting for about four months now, has been noted not just by Mr. Johnston but by every farmer in the north-east of Scotland?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Member's limited range of adjectives will have been noted by everyone in the House. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has said that he will always defend the Department's policies in this House; he will do so whenever challenged to.

"Our Farming Future"

8. **Mr. Marland:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response he has had to his recent policy document "Our Farming Future".

Mr. Gummer: "Our Farming Future" has been widely acknowledged as a realistic and helpful statement of the Government's approach to the challenges facing the farming industry in the 1990s.

Mr. Marland: Is my right hon. Friend aware of how useful, helpful and informative many farmers have found the document "Our Farming Future"? That is because it demonstrates how poorly British farmers co-operate to sell their products—I hope that my right hon. Friend's marketing grants will assist with that problem—and spells out in words of one syllable that the British farmer will not be discriminated against in Europe.

May I take this opportunity of wishing my right hon. Friend the very best of luck at the Agriculture Council meeting next week, when the future of agricultural policy and the appalling proposals of Mr. MacSharry will be discussed?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend. I think that he will agree that "Our Farming Future" could cover only the factors over which we have real control. The decisions that will be made on the common agricultural policy and on the GATT talks will be those which most affect farmers in the future. I want to get those decisions as quickly as possible, but they must be the right decisions because unless they are, the future of British farming will be under a cloud.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that there are at least three farmers in the Bolsover area whose future is bleak? Since June of last year two of them have not been allowed to sell their milk because it is contaminated with dioxins. The Minister has promised on several occasions to ensure that the matter is cleared up. He has received a letter from one of the farmers which I sent him a few days ago. It is time he responded and paid compensation to those farmers, and allowed them to get on with earning their livelihood, instead of telling them that there is nothing for them from the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Gummer: No one would have guessed from that question that every one of the farmers affected has been paid regularly while we carry out the necessary tests to discover what has caused the problem. I have never known a Member of Parliament so unwilling to accept the work that has been done by the Ministry on behalf of his constituents.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there will not be much of a farming future unless British farmers improve their marketing arrangements so that they can compete with foreign imports?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that that is right. Many farmers are taking that message seriously. I compliment the National Farmers Union on bringing out an adventurous scheme to complement what the Government are doing and what farmers are doing. The whole industry is determined to make these changes, and the recent announced by the Milk Marketing Board of its determination to change its own structure is yet another example of an entirely new and welcome move in the industry.

Dr. David Clark: In view of the exhortation by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) a few minutes ago that we should buy British when we buy food, I wonder whether the Minister can tell the House what representations he has received from the Ministry of Defence on his consultation document? Can he further explain to the House how the Ministry of Defence justifies importing thousands of tonnes of beef from South America to feed our forces when we have almost 1 million tonnes in intervention in Europe?

Mr. Gummer: I find it a little difficult to take that kind of question from an hon. Gentleman who said that we ought to eat New Zealand apples and refuse to eat British sausages. That aspect of the hon. Gentleman's role is very difficult to take. I also find it difficult to take from somebody who has said that farmers have not done too badly. Farmers have been rather lucky, he said in a broadcast today. The hon. Gentleman has ceased to have any credibility in the farming industry. I am happy to tell him that my right hon. Friend is now looking to see whether there are better ways of sourcing Ministry of Defence needs among British and other European farmers.

Common Agricultural Policy

9. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress made so far in reforming the European Community's common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: Discussions on CAP reform in the Agriculture Council are continuing. The next meeting of the Council is on Monday.

Mrs. Gorman: What does my right hon. Friend think that people would say when they got their weekend grocery shopping if there was a little item on the end of the bill which read, "This bill includes £18 hidden subsidy, the result of the CAP"? Will he be having any talks with the Cairns group of countries, which involves major food producers such as Australia and New Zealand and is dedicated to getting rid of all subsidies, tariffs and quotas which put extra costs on food, and getting good-quality, cheap food back on the shelves—policies from which our farmers have absolutely nothing to fear?

Mr. Gummer: If such an item were included on the bill, the customer could take the salesperson to the courts for misuse of trade descriptions. Such a bill would be entirely fallacious. It is entirely based upon the fraudulent suggestion that, if we did not support agriculture, the prices now obtaining in the world at large would be our prices. Of course they would not; they are dumped prices as a result of support, and they would not obtain. Therefore, any housewife who receives such a bill should complain to the courts.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Minister agree that, if the general agreement on tariffs and trade talks are concluded successfully and there is subsequent reform of the common agricultural policy, there is a great chance for an increase in production in the intensive sector in the pig and poultry industry once we gain access to cheap grain from the United States?

Mr. Gummer: All kinds of suggestions could be made as to what would be the effect of the major changes which GATT and the CAP reform would bring about. I am not sure that what the right hon. Gentleman says is true. The way to deal with the international support system at the moment is to reduce it right across the board—for all support systems to be reduced at a speed which farmers can bear and which bears on different types of farmers equally, both within the Community and as between the Community and our competitors in the United States. What worries me at the moment about the proposals is that there is discrimination not only against the United Kingdom but against Europe in the way in which the Commission is carrying out the negotiations with the United States.

Sir Donald Thompson: Farmers in Calder valley need continuity, as do farmers all over Europe. Will my right hon. Friend and his Department therefore spend a great deal of time in the next six months talking to our friends the Portuguese through the Portuguese presidency, so that they may adopt a sensible policy which we can then follow?

Mr. Gummer: As Britain will assume the presidency next, we are carefully discussing with the Portuguese how we should proceed with common agricultural policy reform. We cannot bring that about successfully until we know what is to happen with the GATT agreement. It must come first, and then we can implement it through a sensible reform policy that encourages farmers to get closer to the market, helps them with environmentally friendly farming, does not discriminate against the United Kingdom, helps those in the less-favoured areas and gives early retirement to those who are prepared to restructure their farms.

Hedgerows

10. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many miles of hedgerow he expects to be planted in the United Kingdom over each of the next three years.

Mr. Curry: I cannot forecast future plantings, but between 1984 and 1990, some 16,000 miles of hedgerow were planted in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bennett: That is a disappointing answer. Does the Minister accept that the Government have continually prevaricated about encouraging the planting of new hedgerows? Is it not time that they devised a positive policy, to ensure that the many thousands of miles of hedgerows that were grubbed up or allowed to go to waste over the years are replaced? Hedgerows are an important source of protection for flora and fauna, and it is sad that the Government have not dealt with that situation in a positive and effective way.

Mr. Curry: I am somewhat doubtful about a concrete policy for hedgerows. Apart from that, the hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that the Government have for a number of years, under the farm and conservation grants scheme, provided a 40 per cent. rate of aid for new hedgerows. We are committed to legislating as soon as possible on a new scheme to protect hedgerows and to notify the intention to grub up. Meanwhile, the Countryside Commission is to introduce a national hedgerow management scheme this year. Add to that the various set-aside programmes, and the hon. Gentleman will find that agriculture's mood has changed towards amenity, and that, over the coming years, he will have greater cause for satisfaction.

Mr. Nelson: I welcome the Government's measure to protect hedgerows and their management, but among the worst offenders in grubbing up hedgerows are local highway authorities. What advice does my hon. Friend the Minister have for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and local authorities, to ensure that, wherever possible, hedgerows are protected, since they can endure at least as long as roads?

Mr. Curry: I will draw the suggestions that have been made to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. Our advice is that, where hedgerows are to be replaced, they should not be substituted just with a row of quickthorn between two strands of barbed wire, but with a mixed, proper, traditional hedge—which would be much better for the environment and habitat.

Mr. Morley: The action taken through the farm and conservation grants scheme is most welcome, in terms of hedgerow planting. However, is it not the case that, under the present Government, thousands of miles of hedgerows have been lost over the years? Although the Government promise action to preserve hedgerows, they have not produced proposals for a hedgerow protection Bill. Is it not the case that when it comes to positive action and real decisions, the Government are always in the pocket of the landowners?

Mr. Curry: This Government have done more than any of their predecessors to put the environment at the top of the agricultural agenda. Ours is the only Government who have as a priority in our negotiations in Brussels the provision that all subsidies should be subject to some form of environmental assessment. I am at one with the hon. Gentleman in believing that it is important that we develop such a policy—but neither he nor I, nor anyone else, can say that any particular state of agriculture is frozen. We must ensure that farmers realise that it is in their interests to restore the habitat and hedges. Everyone benefits from profitable and efficient agriculture, and from an amenity that we can all enjoy.

Environmentally Sound Agriculture

11. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what specific grants are available to farmers to encourage the adoption of environmentally sound practices on agriculture.

Mr. Gummer: My Department offers a number of grants to farmers that encourage the adoption of environmentally sound practices. Those and all other grants available from other statutory organisations are listed in our booklet "Conservation and Diversification Grants for Farmers".

Mr. Steen: Does my right hon. Friend agree that farmers are caught in a pincer movement between the National Rivers Authority, which threatens prosecution of farmers who use more fertiliser on their land to increase productivity, and the banks, which are increasing their interest rates on loans to farmers, because they are considered a bad risk? Will my right hon. Friend, in his role as David against the EC Goliath, do his best to increase the grants available to farmers, so that, if they practise green policies, they will get their rewards?

Mr. Gummer: A clearly stated aim of our debates in the European Community is the placing of environmentally sensitive farming at the centre of the reform of the common agricultural policy. We want to see the environment as a central theme, not as an "add-on extra" —a complementary series of measures, as proposed by Mr. MacSharry. That is one of the major changes in the MacSharry proposals that we intend to secure.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir Anthony Grant: Does my right hon. Friend recall that, when he was eight and I was a little older, Her Majesty the Queen acceded to the throne? Will he join me in expressing our deep respect, our loyal affection and our good wishes to Her Majesty on the 40th anniversary of her accession?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Queen has set a shining example of steadfast service over four decades of momentous political and social change, and will he wish her many more years of a great and glorious reign?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to accept my hon. Friend's invitation. The Cabinet discussed the matter this morning, and the whole House may care to listen to the message that the Cabinet agreed to send Her Majesty:

> "At the Cabinet meeting today, Your Majesty's Ministers agreed that I should convey to Your Majesty our warmest good wishes on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Your Accession to the Throne. This was in recognition of the incomparable contribution Your Majesty has made to the life of our nation throughout your Reign."

I am sure that those are sentiments that the whole House would wish to endorse.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Kinnock: May I join the Prime Minister—and, I am sure, the whole House—in sending good wishes to Her Majesty, and in expressing the admiration that I know is felt throughout our country, the Commonwealth and, indeed, the wider world for the wisdom, strength and dedication that Her Majesty has invariably shown throughout the four decades in which she has been our sovereign?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the right hon. Gentleman speaks for all our millions of fellow citizens.

Mr. Kinnock: May I—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Kinnock.

Mr. Kinnock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When the Prime Minister told us on Tuesday that, like the British economy, Japan's economy was, as he put it, in recession, had he overlooked the fact that last year, while our economy shrank by 2·5 per cent., Japan's economy grew by 4·5 per cent.?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, a number of countries around the world are in recession, are heading towards recession or are coming out of recession. According to the latest figures, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden are at the moment in recession. In the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, the worst of the recession is over; in West Germany and Japan, growth has slowed and is slowing.

I noted this morning that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) now at last admits that there is a world situation which is on a downturn. I hope that the Leader of the Opposition will also have the courage to admit that.

Mr. Kinnock: There are economies that are slowing; ours is in reverse because of the Prime Minister's policies.

On Tuesday, the Prime Minister said that Japan was in recession. It is worth reminding him of the fact that Japan's economy grew by 4·5 per cent., and ours shrank by 2·5 per cent. Japan's unemployment is at 2 per cent., while ours is at 9 per cent. Is it not now obvious that, because of his policies, the Prime Minister is reduced to imagining recovery at home while inventing recessions abroad?

The Prime Minister: Every one of the right hon. Gentleman's policies would lead to a continuing recession, and that is well known. The right hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that I head a Government who have cut interest rates seven times in the past 12 months, halved inflation in a year and built up the best industrial relations in half a century. The reality, I fear, is that the right hon. Gentleman does not understand the economy or how it works. The right conditions for economic growth are low taxes, the right hon. Gentleman wants high taxes; low inflation, the right hon. Gentleman would engender high inflation; and good labour relations, the right hon. Gentleman would reintroduce the old, bad trade union practices. Everything that the right hon. Gentleman proposes would lead to the perpetual recession of which I spoke on Tuesday.

Sir Bernard Braine: May I revert to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant)? I speak as Father of the House. Is it not a matter of great rejoicing, wherever we may sit in the

House, that throughout the past 40 years, which have seen such momentous changes as the peaceful transition from empire to Commonwealth, the ending of the cold war and the coming together of former enemies in the European Community, Her Majesty has presided over this nation unfailingly, with a dignity and devotion to duty for which we are all greatly thankful?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is right and speaks with the authority of many years' membership of the House. One of the most striking facts of the Commonwealth, as I saw clearly at the Commonwealth conference in Harare, is the immense affection and admiration that exists for Her Majesty the Queen among all Commonwealth leaders and countries.

Mr. Ashdown: May I associate myself, my right hon. and hon. Friends and our party with the sentiments expressed by the Prime Minister on the 40th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne?

On the more unhappy subject of Northern Ireland, in the light of the appalling horrors which last night added to the seemingly endless litany of tragedy in that unhappy Province, does the Prime Minister agree that the first condition for defeating terrorism in Northern Ireland is to ensure that the politicians there get together and work together?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the whole House will share the right hon. Gentleman's view on both the matters that he raised. The recent activities—the shooting of five men and the wounding of others the other evening—were another terrible and unnecessary scar on the history of Northern Ireland. It would greatly assist the activities in Northern Ireland and the search for peace if the clearest possible lead was given by all politicians in this country and Northern Ireland.

Sir Alan Glyn: I thank my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for his message from the Cabinet and Government. Is he aware of early day motion 580, already signed by 165 hon. Members, which expresses the views of Back Benchers and their loyalty and congratulations to Her Majesty? It does not include members of the Cabinet or Government, or of the shadow Cabinet, and, unfortunately, is not even allowed to include Parliamentary Private Secretaries. Will my right hon. Friend please convey that message to Her Majesty?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend expresses sentiments that are shared by the whole House.

Mr. Molyneaux: May I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends with the tribute paid by the Prime Minister to Her Majesty the Queen, and may I join in the other congratulations already expressed?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, and I shall ensure that Her Majesty is aware of what has been said.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): May I associate myself with the Prime Minister's remarks about Queen Elizabeth II? Does the right hon. Gentleman really believe that if politicians in Northern Ireland had been sitting at a table, the awful atrocities that we have witnessed in the past few days would not have taken place? If he and this House believe that, there is no hope for Northern Irleland.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's words about Her Majesty the Queen.

The point that I was seeking to make a moment ago —I reiterate it now—is that I think that it is to the advantage of everyone in Northern Ireland for the politicians of Northern Ireland, of all shades of opinion, to come together, to talk and to express their mutual wish for peace in Northern Ireland.

Q2. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Eastham: The latest year for which figures are available on the number of new houses built in the United Kingdom is 1990. A comparison with 1980 shows that 38,000 fewer houses were built in 1990. Why is it the policy of the Government to build fewer houses?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman might more accurately have asked which local authorities had the highest number of vacant dwellings. I shall tell him: numbers of vacant dwellings are highest in Liverpool, then in Manchester, then in Salford, then in Burnley, then in Brent, then in Hackney, then in Tower Hamlets, then in Knowsley, then in Newcastle and then in Wolverhampton. The characteristic of all those areas is that for a long time they have been Labour controlled, although Conservatives have been in control in Brent for the past year and the Liberal Democrats have recently been in control in Tower Hamlets. There is no doubt which party fails people on housing.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Has my right hon. Friend noticed the remarks of Sir Brian Corby, the president of the CBI, who said that to sign the social charter would be an act of remarkable lunacy? Does he agree that, if we signed the social chapter, employers' costs would rise and jobs and foreign investment would disappear, all of which would be bad for this country?

The Prime Minister: I most certainly agree with that view, which is why I declined to sign the social chapter. I believe that it would cost jobs and cost prosperity in this country. It is noticeable that a number of other politicians abroad have made it perfectly clear that this country becomes a more attractive place for investment—and therefore for jobs and prosperity—because we are not committed to the costs of the social chapter.

Q3. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Griffiths: Why have pensions dropped from 20 per cent. of average earnings to 16 per cent. under the Tories? Does the Prime Minister believe that pensioners were paid too much in 1979, or will he express regret at that meanness and raise pensions in line with Labour's plans?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should look at history. If he talks about pensioners, he should let the facts speak for themselves: under the previous Labour Government, the real average income of pensioners rose by only 3 per cent. and their income from savings fell by

16 per cent. The Labour party had no place for pensioners in the past and no promises that it can properly meet for the future.

Sir Ian Lloyd: The Prime Minister will no doubt have noticed the interesting exception that President Bush made in his state of the union message to Congress, when he said that his Government were too big and spent too much. The exception was that he proposed to maintain research expenditure at the record level of $77 billion and to make permanent the fiscal allowances for research and development. If my right hon. Friend should be considering with his right hon. Friend the Chancellor any largesse over the next two or three weeks, will he ensure that a few crumbs from the Treasury table fall in that direction?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will know that there was a real-terms increase in the science and technology budget this year, a point that has been readily acknowledged by scientists up and down the country. As for potential largesse, there is no lack of applications for any that there might be.

Q4. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Banks: May I thank the Prime Minister for allowing his Ministers to vote as they wish on the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill on Friday 14 February, St. Valentine's day? If the Bill is passed, it will stop the massacre of harmless creatures like deer, hares and foxes. No one expects the Prime Minister to be here to vote on Friday 14 February, but will he tell the House and the country whether he supports the abolition of fox hunting, deer hunting and hare coursing? I hope that his answer is yes.

The Prime Minister: It is a matter for the individual conscience of every hon. Member, which is precisely why I am allowing a free vote by my Ministers on the Bill. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Bill in question goes a good deal wider than just the matters that he has been addressing. Because it goes a good deal wider, I will not myself be supporting it.

Q5. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Colvin: Will my right hon. Friend send a message today to the leaders of the National Association of Local Government Officers who are spending some £2 million on a shoddy and inaccurate advertising campaign, telling them that their policies of abandoning competitive tendering, abolishing the Audit Commission and introducing a minimum wage would be acceptable only to a party which has already sold its soul to the trade union bosses?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very sound point. It is clear that the advertisements appearing today show that now, as in the past, the Labour party remains in hock to the trade unions.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week, please?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 FEBRUARY—Until about seven o'clock Second Reading of the Offshore Safety Bill *[Lords]*.

Motions on the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order and the Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order.

Motion on the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order.

TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*.

Consideration of timetable motion on the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Severn Bridges Bill.

Second Reading of the Museums and Galleries Bill.

Proceedings on the Social Security Consolidation Bills. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motions on Welsh revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Army Bill.

FRIDAY 14 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 17 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Transport and Works Bill.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee A will meet on Wednesday 12 February, at 10.30 am, to consider European Community document No. 4496/91 relating to allocation of slots at Community airports.

[Wednesday 12 February—Social Security Consolidation Bills.

1. *Social Security Administration Bill [Lords].*
2. *Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Bill [Lords].*
3. *Social Security (Consequential Provisions) Bill [Lords].*
4. *Social Security (Consequential Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Bill [Lords].*
5. *Social Security Contributions and Benefits Bill [Lords].*
6. *Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Bill [Lords].*

Wednesday 12 February—Welsh Revenue Support Grant Reports.

1. *Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1992-3 (HC 151).*
2. *Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 3) (HC 152).*
3. *Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (No. 3) (HC 153).*

Wednesday 12 February—European Standing Committee A.

Relevant European Community Document—4496/91 Allocation of Runway Slots at Airports.

Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee—HC 29-xxii (1990-91) and HC 24-x (1991-92).]

Dr. Cunningham: Has the Leader of the House seen the sad and apparently serious announcement about errors in the treatment of many patients at the North Staffordshire royal infirmary? Can we be assured that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is inquiring into the matter? When the Secretary of State has had an opportunity to do so, may we have early next week a statement in the House about what is to be done in the interests of reassuring people, if that is possible, and of ensuring that the errors are not repeated?

Why are the Government railroading another Education Bill through the House with a guillotine? Why has the Secretary of State for Education and Science got into such a terrible mess with his legislation? Should we not have proper and adequate opportunities here to consider in detail the Further and Higher Education Bill, especially as it proposes to give draconian powers to the Secretary of State? Is this not further evidence of the Government's hidden timetable for a general election on 9 April? Why do not the Government come clean and announce that date, so that we can all co-operate in clearing up the dregs of the Government's business and get on with the election?

Can we have a statement next week about house repossessions and the Government's scheme that was supposed to help mortgage payers in difficulty? Why is it that so far only one building society has set up any scheme at all to help people in difficulties? Why did the Prime Minister claim in his interview on "Desert Island Discs" that the Government had solved the problem when that is manifestly not the case and when people involved in housing and building societies are still forecasting—sadly—that about 80,000 repossessions will take place this year? Should we not have another statement on the Government's scheme, which apparently has yet to get off the ground?

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, I shall discuss the North Staffordshire royal infirmary with my right hon. Friend.

I shall make one or two points in relation to the Further and Higher Education Bill. As the hon. Gentleman will know, we have a very heavy programme for this Session. Indeed, I have just announced four Second Readings for next week, including two new Bills, which I believe will be welcomed. I am hoping to fit in another Bill which has not yet been published but which I know is much demanded by all hon. Members. Therefore, I have to pay close regard to that and to trying to ensure that we manage the legislative timetable as best we possibly can.

On the Further and Higher Education Bill, there is much demand from universities, polytechnics, further education colleges and sixth form colleges to get on with it as quickly as possible so that any risk of a damaging effect on morale caused by delays and uncertainties can be avoided. That is what we are doing.

The hon. Gentleman referred to draconian powers in the Bill. He will know that the issue was much discussed in another place and that amendments have been made as a result. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall have proper, adequate opportunities—as we did with the Local Government Finance Bill—to discuss all the issues that arose in another place, including the one that the hon. Gentleman raised, as he will realise when he sees the timetable that I propose to introduce next week.

I think that the hon. Gentleman and I agreed—although perhaps not every hon. Member agrees with us—in the Select Committee on the Sittings of the House chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and welcomed the idea of timetables for Bills. The way in which we do it can be discussed, and no doubt we shall discuss it next Tuesday, but I think that he and I are agreed on the principle. We can discuss the details in a full debate next week, but the principle has been widely accepted and has worked well in the case of the Local Government Finance Bill.

On house repossessions, the hon. Gentleman will know that one part of the package to deal with house possessions included the Bill which the House passed last night, so we have been getting on with exactly that package. He will know that one building society has already reached an agreement. A considerable number of them are already taking a different view of repossessions, and I am sure that others will follow that lead.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows that we are also to have an important statement on security in Northern Ireland. I shall allow business questions to continue until 4.5 pm, but I ask hon. Members to concentrate on the business for next week and not to seek to make purely electioneering points.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): With regard to next Tuesday's guillotine motion—the weekly guillotine motion—will my right hon. Friend please ensure that the timetable is drawn up so as to allow plenty of time to discuss vocational adult education? Those sections of the Bill are causing concern in Leicestershire.

Mr. MacGregor: I am, of course, aware of my hon. Friend's concern, as he has expressed it before in debates to which I have responded. I shall endeavour to ensure that the timetable is drawn up so as to allow all parts of the Bill to be discussed. I shall bear my hon. Friend's point in mind.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Leader of the House will note a motion on today's Order Paper in the name of his right hon. Friend the Treasurer to Her Majesty's Household to convene a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Edinburgh to debate the Scottish Constitutional Convention. As many of his right hon. and hon. Friends often remind us, such questions are matters with implications for the whole of the United Kingdom. Therefore, if deliberations on the Bill to be introduced tomorrow by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell)—the Home Rule (Scotland) Bill—are not completed, will the Leader of the House ensure that time will be made available to debate it next week?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an assurance of any extra time next week for Bills promoted by any of his hon. Friends.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I ask my right hon. Friend to consider early-day motion 285.

[That this House views with alarm the hardship faced by thousands of pub licensees and the damage being done to the interests of consumers and to the industry as a whole; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to review the 1989 Beer Orders as a matter of the utmost urgency.]

The early-day motion is signed by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) and myself, among others, and has the support of 226 hon. Members from all parties. It reflects the anxieties of thousands of publicans throughout the land who are worried about the possible loss of their livelihood through the implementation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on beer, and the manner in which the regulations are being introduced.

Will my right hon. Friend please understand the urgency of the matter, which is causing great concern? Will he arrange for a debate on the subject, or a statement—or, if he cannot do either of those things, will he discuss with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry the urgent need for a review of the Bill?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend will have seen from the announcement that I have just made that next week will be very busy, so I cannot promise any time for a debate. However, I can assure him that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government are aware of the anxiety of licensees, and have met the major brewers to urge them to show understanding of licensees' difficulties. As my hon. Friend will know, the brewers have taken a number of steps in response—most notably by offering independent arbitration. My right hon. and hon. Friends are continuing to monitor developments closely.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that his answer on the north Staffordshire hospitals was far too leisurely? He merely said that he would discuss the matter with the Minister. It has been reported that nearly a thousand cancer patients have been wrongly treated for nine years. This could well be a matter of life and death. We want a statement today. The right hon. Gentleman should go and find the Minister now, and bring him to the Dispatch Box to tell us why people have been treated in that way. Will he please act at once?

Mr. MacGregor: I am afraid that I do not know the details of the issue, but I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I shall raise the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State straight away.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I was surprised to hear my right hon. Friend say that he hoped to get the Further and Higher Education Bill through so rapidly on Tuesday, and also discuss a timetable motion. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Milton (Mr. Latham) has said, there are loads of objections to the Bill. It is all very well to say that the other place has considered the Bill, but their Lordships were not aware of the many hundreds of representations that have been made in the east midlands and other parts of the country. Those representations can be dealt with, and matters put right, only in Committee stage, with a proper and fruitful debate. I hope that my right hon. Friend does not expect some of us to support a timetable motion in this case.

Mr. MacGregor: I assure my hon. Friend that I am aware of the issue that he has raised. He too has raised the subject of adult education on the Floor of the House. However, I did not suggest that the Bill would be dealt with next week any faster than is normal. We shall devote

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the whole day to Second Reading, when it will be possible to raise such matters, exactly as we do with any other Bill. Second Reading will not be accelerated. Then we shall have a timetable motion, and my hon. Friend will be able to see—I hope that he will agree—that we are giving adequate consideration to the Committee stage. The Bill will then come back to the House in the normal way for further consideration.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made next week in response to what has been said by the chairman of the British yarn show, which opened in Leicester yesterday? That gentleman, who is also the chairman of Benson Turner in my constituency, said that the Government were indifferent towards dumping and illegal subsidies by other countries, and that the Department of Trade and Industry seemed completely indifferent to the representations rapidly made by the trade associations. He said that, if an improved attitude was not forthcoming, there would not be a spinning industry left to be dealt with by the Department of Trade and Industry. May we have an urgent statement to clarify the position, which has been criticised clearly and strongly by an important member of the industry?

Mr. MacGregor: I have not seen the speech, so I cannot comment on it. In view of the business next week, I doubt whether I can promise an oral statement on the matter, but I will raise it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should have a debate on the health service next week? Has he noted the contribution that might be made by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who has promised a leak a week? Does my right hon. Friend think that the hon. Gentleman already has leaked information, or are we in the business of hiring a theft a week?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not want to comment on the second part of the question unless other hon. Members raise it with me, in which case I should be happy to do so. I should be delighted to arrange further opportunities for debates on the health service as soon as we can find the time in which to do so. It is noticeable that the Labour party is reduced to using leaked management reports to denigrate NHS hospitals and to put entirely the wrong gloss on them, and to denigrate the people working in those hospitals for the sake of cheap publicity. We should be happy to refute all those cases.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the Leader of the House arrange next week for a debate on the continuing problems facing the fishing industry? Would it be possible for us not only to discuss the 135-day tie-up and its implications, but, following the meeting between the Prime Minister and President Yeltsin, to consider especially the potential market in central and eastern Europe for the representatives of the pelagic fleet?

Mr. MacGregor: I recognise the importance of the issue, but given the pressure on business at the moment, I cannot promise the hon. Lady a debate next week in Government time. However, as she knows, there are other ways in which such matters can be raised.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will my right hon. Friend provide time for an urgent debate on the situation of the raspberry growers in Tayside? He will be aware that Mr. MacSharry and his officials have been unable to arrive at an understanding or agreement which will ensure that we have a raspberry industry in Tayside in future.

Mr. MacGregor: As a former Minister of Agriculture, I am well aware of the difficulties that the raspberry industry faces from time to time in relation to imports. I am extremely well aware of the importance of that industry to Tayside, so I understand the importance of my hon. Friend's point. I am sure that he will make further representations to my right hon. Friend and hon. Friends at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the matter. I know that the difficulty is often to obtain evidence to get appropriate action to deal with the matter.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): The right hon. Gentleman gave a reply a few minutes ago about the agruments between the licensees and the brewers, and he referred especially to the possibilities of arbitration. Will he take into account the fact that many of the cases that have been brought to our attention show that the offer of arbitration is an absolute fraud and that individual licencees have often been thrown out of their premises in the most shameful circumstances? Will the right hon. Gentleman give a guarantee that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will come to the Dispatch Box next week to make a proper statement on the matter, so that he can be cross-examined?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give a guarantee that there will be a statement next week, because of the pressures on business. However, I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that Department of Trade and Industry Ministers are in contact with the major brewers to ensure that the procedures for independent arbitration or for assessment of rents provide genuine recourse for tenants. If the right hon. Gentleman has particular cases that he wishes to raise, I am sure that he will draw them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate next week on pedestrian safety, so that I can explain to the House the urgent need for more crossings in various parts of my constituency, not least at Church road in Northholt, Argyle road in Ealing and Rowsell road in Northolt, where children and elderly people are seriously at risk? We have not discussed pedestrian road crossings, which are important in areas with a high volume of traffic such as those I have mentioned. May we have an early debate?

Mr. MacGregor: I am afraid that I cannot promise a debate in Government time. I know how assiduous my hon. Friend is in pursuing the interests of his constituents. He has raised particular constituency issues, and I hope that he is able to find other opportunities, such as Adjournment debates, to discuss them.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the proposed debate on three Northern Ireland Orders in Council next

Monday? Does he not appreciate that that is a particularly inconvenient arrangement for hon. Members representing Northern Ireland? The Order in Council procedure is particularly unsatisfactory for us because, as a direct result of direct rule, we have a large amount of business to transact in Northern Ireland. If we have no assurance that the debate is at a convenient time, that business becomes disrupted. He might also like to reflect that we do not need the debate at all, because those orders apply to Northern Ireland legislation that has already been enacted in this House for Great Britain. If the legislation for Great Britain was done properly, we would not have to have such orders in the first place.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman's second point raises wider considerations, but the arrangements I have made for next week in relation to Northern Ireland will enable in hon. Members to discuss the Orders in Council on the Floor of the House. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that there are often considerable difficulties in juggling all the requirements of the business for the week. I endeavour, wherever possible, to put business on appropriate days for those most interested. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that my arrangement means that we have adequate time for the debate on the Orders in Council, and that it will be held at a convenient time.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I congratulate the Government on their excellent campaign to alert parents to the dangers their children can get into with the abuse of solvents. Currently, the death rate is about two children every week. Therefore, would it not be appropriate to have a debate next week, in which hon. Members from all political parties could take part, to point out, yet again, the dangers to parents and to remind them of the need to keep an eye on their children?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend will know that the Government have embarked on a major publicity campaign to achieve precisely what he suggests. I hope that as many hon. Members as possible will assist that campaign by the work they do in their constituencies, as my hon. Friend clearly intends to do.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Will the Leader of the House consider early-day motion 611, on the summary dismissal of Mr. David Plowright from his position as chairman of Granada Television?

[That this House is angered by the summary removal of Mr. David Plowright as Chairman of Granada Television; believes this crass act to be a direct result of Government policy in auctioning television franchises; recognises that this consequence has given the clearest indication yet that the future of independent television will be based upon profit, at the expense of programmes; notes that the recent successful franchise bid by Mr. Plowright and his team was part conditional upon him, and his management colleagues remaining in office until 1st January 1995; and therefore calls upon the Independent Television Commission to intervene.]

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Granada Television was awarded the franchise despite the fact that the consortium put together by North West Television bid nearly four times as much as Granada Television? It bid £35 million against the bid of £9 million by Granada. The members of that consortium have been found to be perfectly acceptable for the franchise on the other side of the Pennines. Therefore, it was the proven quality of Granada's programmes which led to its award of the franchise. The decision on Mr. Plowright shows a cynical abandonment by Grenada of the criterion and demonstrates the essential stupidity of the arcane rules upon which the award of franchises is based. Will the right hon. Gentleman promise a statement on this matter next week?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is not for me to comment on the individual actions that happened within the company. However, it is right for me to comment on the general points he raised in relation to programme quality. As he knows, the Independent Television Commission awards licences to companies and not to individuals. Each company's programme promises are incorporated in its licence conditions. Those will be enforced by the commission. It has a range of sanctions that it can impose under the Broadcasting Act 1990, including that of withdrawing the licence, if those promises are not met.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for an urgent debate on the plans for the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community? In particular, will he take careful note of the fact that the logo for our presidency shows a lion at the centre of the flag? That will be appropriate if we are in government, but if we are not, it must be replaced by a lamb.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that the logo that we have chosen is appropriate to show that we shall maintain British interests in a robust way, while of course participating absolutely fully in the European Community. That is what the symbol is designed to show.

I note my hon. Friend's request for a debate. I agree that these are extremely important matters, and I hope that the House will debate them on a number of occasions. They will also be a major issue to be discussed during the general election campaign, whenever it comes, because it is a key issue in relation to choice before the electorate. Whether next week is right for a debate I rather doubt. My hon. Friend will have to wait a little longer.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the Leader of the House provide time for a debate on early-day motion 481 relating to standing charges?

[That this House views with great concern standing charges being imposed on pensioners by British Gas, Electricity and Telecom, meaning an extra burden of £190 per year; recognising that many pensioners are already living below the poverty line, finds these scandalous charges a drain on their already stretched resources; therefore calls for the immediate abolition of all standing charges; and calls for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to call a meeting with all companies concerned with a view to alleviating this unnecessary hardship.]

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that those charges represent fraudulent charges being imposed by British Telecom and the electricity and gas undertakings, because they are inflicting great hardship on senior citizens, who are currently having to fork out £190 a year to meet them? Will he do something about that?

Mr. MacGregor: It is the Government's view, in general, that it is better to give pensioners the money to spend as they prefer. The hon. Gentleman will know that there have been substantial improvements in pensioners'

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incomes in recent years and that, on those who are not sharing in that very substantial improvement, the Government have focused particular increases, involving substantial sums from the taxpayer.

We believe that it is better to do that, rather than to devote large sums to subsidies to, for example, the electricity companies, which is what would be involved in doing if we did what the hon. Gentleman suggests. The money would go to many people who have no difficulty in paying for the services. It is much better to target Government subsidies on those most in need.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that many Conservative Members remain bitterly disappointed that there will be no opportunity next week to debate secondary education? Such a debate would give us an opportunity to remind the British people that the only party committed to the retention of grammar schools, CTCs, the assisted places scheme and as much variety of provision as possible, giving freedom of parental choice, is the Conservative party, whereas the Labour party and the party of the quasi-Liberal Democrats are wholly committed to the comprehensive system. Will he arrange for a debate to take place on secondary education, if not next week then the week after?

May I further ask——

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has asked his question.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend will agree that we are absolutely right to give priority also to higher education, to the proposals for polytechnics becoming universities and in giving priority to further education and to the 16-to-18 age group. That is what we will be talking about next week.

My hon. Friend will be aware that we have passed, at any rate through this Chamber, an important measure relating to choice and improving standards in schools. I hope that we shall have other opportunities to debate that issue, because I agree strongly with him about the need to ensure diversity of provision for schools.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): I join other hon. Members in asking the Leader of the House to act with much greater urgency over the care of cancer patients at the north Staffordshire royal infirmary in my constituency. The confidence of cancer patients who come to that unit from all over north Wales, Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire will have been severely jolted by events today.

The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate that cancer is a traumatic illness with which to deal and that confidence means everything. For that reason, I appeal to him not to delay in asking the Secretary of State to make a statement and to set up a Department of Health inquiry to look into whether other health authorities have similar software problems, whether there is any question of criminal negligence, what the role of the inspectorate was and what the liability situation would have been if the health authority in question had been an opted-out trust. Would it then be expected to pick up the cost of any claims for damages that might arise affecting the hospital? In the interests of those patients, who are suffering enormous trauma today, will the Government act with more urgency in the matter?

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely understand the importance of the hon. Gentleman's point, but I cannot answer his detailed questions. Indeed, I suspect that some of them would take a little time to investigate. I cannot act more quickly than I have already undertaken to do, which is to contact my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health immediately after business questions.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Could we have a debate on party political broadcasts to discuss misleading claims like the one made in the Labour party broadcast, which claimed that the *Financial Times* backed Labour policy when it turned out that the broadcast was quoting out of context the words of an FT columnist. Despite the fact that the FT is a pink newspaper, its real views were expressed in a leader that described Labour policies as a cocktail that included a dollop of Government interference, a shake of 1960s sentimentality laced with large quantities of bureaucracy, a fizz of galloping quangos, all topped off with the soothing cream of ineffable blandness. Does my right hon. Friend think that the Labour party will quote that in its next political broadcast?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes some good points in his own words. I shall add only the fact that one of the major issues, which we have debated in the House and which will be debated frequently in the country and the House in the coming months, is the Labour party's high spending and tax policies.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can we have a debate on the future of the bus industry and perhaps consider setting up an inquiry into Volvo's secret corporate strategy in the United Kingdom to close down parts of British manufacturing industry, transfer production to Sweden and set up screwdriver plants in Scotland? I wish to debate those matters, because many jobs in my constituency are at stake.

Mr. MacGregor: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman could raise that matter in the debate this afternoon.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), will my right hon. Friend at least make time for a statement next week on the future of Battersea Park school? Its application to the Secretary of State for Education to become the Battersea technology college is supported by Wandsworth council, the community, the parents and 100 per cent. of the teaching staff, but it is being blocked by that small motivated group, the Battersea Labour party. Would not a statement give that group's representatives in the House an opportunity to explain why they put political ideology before the interests of the children of Battersea?

Mr. MacGregor: I well understand my hon. Friend's point, because I remember dealing with the early stages of that proposal. Although I should like the matter to be debated more fully, my hon. Friend must find other ways, as he has this afternoon, to raise the issue.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Speaking as the only radiographer in the House, may I add my voice to those of other Members for north Staffordshire in emphasising the urgency of the need for a full statement on what has happened in north Staffordshire hospitals? It is essential that every computer and all computer software is looked at in hospitals throughout the country.

It is absolutely essential that patients are confident that they are receiving the recommended dosage. At the north Staffordshire hospital, it was a case of under-dosage, whereas in Exeter the problem seemed to concern over-dosage. I do not want radiographers to shoulder the blame again for what has happened in north Staffordshire, as happened in Exeter. The blame must be put where it rightly belongs and there should be a clinical inquiry, so that other hospitals with the same equipment can be investigated.

Mr. MacGregor: As I have already explained, I have no details of that incident, so it would not be right for me to comment on them. I shall ensure that the hon. Lady's points are also drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week to debate the extremely serious report that has appeared in the Sunday papers—I think that it appeared in the *Sunday Express*—which is backed up by a document from the Inland Revenue? It says that protection money paid by business men in Northern Ireland to paramilitaries, despite the fact that it is illegal, is being treated as tax expenditure by the Inland Revenue. If that is so, it has serious implications of subsidies by the British taxpayer to paramilitary organisations such as the IRA.

Mr. MacGregor: The matter raised by my hon. Friend is one for the Inland Revenue, but I shall ensure that what she has just said will be drawn to the attention of the appropriate authorities.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May we have an early debate to discuss two urgent reforms: first, a privacy law to protect all British citizens against intrusive and malicious gutter journalism; secondly, a freedom of information Act to satisfy fully the public's right to know the background of all public policies?

Mr. MacGregor: We have already had a debate on the latter point, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made the Government's position clear. On the first point, as the hon. Gentleman will know, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made it clear that the Government are studying the Press Complaints Commission's first year of operation to see how it can deal with the issue. There will be a review in the summer of the way in which it is operated. I know that much concern is frequently expressed about the issue that I think the hon. Member has in mind. We shall have to see how the matter progresses and consider it in the review.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry that it has not been possible to include all the hon. Members who wished to participate, but I shall do my best at an early opportunity next week to call those who have not spoken today.

Security (Northern Ireland)

4.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): Mr. Speaker, I will, with permission, make a statement about the current security situation in Northern Ireland.

It is my sad duty to report that, since the beginning of this month, 12 people have died in circumstances directly related to the continuation of terrorism in the Province.

The proscribed loyalist terrorist organisation, the Ulster Freedom Fighters, has admitted responsibility for two attacks which have led to the deaths of six people. They include five, two of them teenagers, murdered in a bookmaker's office in Belfast yesterday. Two persons have been arrested in connection with the earlier UFF murder of a taxi driver at his home in north Belfast.

Three persons were killed by an off-duty police officer in the Sinn Fein advice centre on the Falls road. That officer subsequently took his own life. The IRA claimed responsibility for the murder of a bread delivery man in Dungannon and are believed to have been responsible for the attempted murder yesterday near Belleek of a dog warden, who was also a part-time member of the UDR. In this incident, one terrorist was killed. Following it, three persons have been apprehended by the Garda Siochana. In relation to all of these incidents, vigorous follow-up action is in train and will continue.

I know that the whole House will wish to join me in expressing sympathy to all those who have been so suddenly bereaved. Each of these deaths represents a personal tragedy, but each is also part of a wider tragedy in which the whole community, Protestant and Catholic, Unionist and nationalist, shares. For let there be no doubt that the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland deeply abhor, and want no part of, the wanton destruction perpetrated by that tiny minority who, without democratic, moral or spiritual authority have taken upon themselves the right to decide who should live or die.

As we have seen in recent days, notably in the trade union rally in Belfast last Tuesday and in the unequivocal statement of leading Churchmen, the overwhelming majority of decent people are increasingly making their voice heard and their influence felt. Individuals are coming forward—making use of the confidential telephone and in other ways—to help the police to prevent outrages and to apprehend the criminals. It is vital that this should continue. Terrorists—from whatever side they come—represent no one but themselves. The community has a vital role to play in making them realise that they will never achieve their objectives through violence.

However, a particular responsibility for dealing with terrorism lies with the Government and the security forces. We will not shirk that responsibility. The House will recall the announcement last month of the arrival in Northern Ireland of substantial numbers of additional troops. The level of military reinforcement for the police will continue to be kept under review and further adjustments may be made. We will take whatever action is necessary to bring terrorism to an end, but we will not abandon the underlying principle of our security policy, which is a determination to deal with terrorism under the rule of law.

In accordance with that policy, the police, supported by the armed forces, have achieved, in the last few weeks, further significant successes. A very high proportion of

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intended attacks are being prevented or aborted. Substantial quantities of arms and explosives—some of it clearly intended for immediate use—have been seized. In these and other situations, important arrests have been made. There will be more seizures and more arrests. The House will recall that almost 400 people were charged with terrorist-related crimes in Northern Ireland last year.

Last week the leaders of the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland agreed that, at my invitation, they would meet to consider matters of common concern in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland. No matter is of greater shared concern to the people of Northern Ireland and their political leaders than the present security situation. In view of this, and against the background of recent events, the Prime Minister has indicated that he proposes to invite the four leaders to a meeting with both of us to concentrate on that issue. This will ensure that at the highest levels of government we can hear directly from political leaders who understand and represent the views of the people in Northern Ireland who inevitably have borne the brunt of recent events.

The security situation in Northern Ireland is a matter for serious concern; but it is not, and will not be allowed to get, out of control. That is my conviction and that of the Chief Constable. As the Chief Constable said yesterday, a number of new anti-terrorist measures have recently been introduced in Belfast. The House may be assured that, in the discharge of their responsibilities for security in Northern Ireland, the Government and the security forces will take whatever further measures are judged to be necessary and effective.

Mr. Kevin McNamara: (Kingston upon Hull, North): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends I express our sympathy to those who have been so grievously bereaved of loved ones or who have been injured during the events of the past week.

This was a week which was to start with so much confidence and hope. There was the visit of the President of the Republic to cross-community groups in Belfast and the great demonstration organised by the Northern Ireland committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to demonstrate its revulsion at the Tyrone killings. Those hopes have been apparently dashed by yesterday's and Monday's events.

While I have been in Belfast over the past few days, people have been numbed by the atrocities, and their grief amounts to almost complete despair. It is therefore important that we reiterate in this House the statement of the Chief Constable that security is not out of control. There have been considerable successes. Those who would deny that can only give joy to the terrorists and undermine the confidence of the public in the security forces in the difficult task which they are carrying out on behalf of us all on both these islands.

Equally, it must be realised that there is no easy answer to this problem. Short of bringing the whole of Belfast to a complete stop, which, together with the introduction of internment is the terrorists' aim, no security system can guarantee 100 per cent. protection. Even if those events were to come about, there would be no certainty against the maverick killer and the random sectarian assassin.

For the Chief Constable and his forces it is a long haul, but in the end it is one that must and will prevail. We must not underestimate or underplay the successes that they have had.

Can the Secretary of State assure the House that the Chief Constable has all the resources of men, women and materials that he feels are necessary for him and his force to carry out their difficult task? Can he tell us that, if any further reinforcements are needed from the Army, they will be immediately provided? As to the Secretary of State's contribution to achieving confidence in the security forces and the rule of law, will he take an early opportunity to make a full statement on the Nelson affair to this House?

The statement a few weeks ago following the right hon. Gentleman's talks with the party leaders—that the talks were basically to be put on ice—caused great disappointment not only in this island but more particularly in Northern Ireland. When the Prime Minister meets him and the leaders of the constitutional parties—and I trust that they will accept the invitation that they have heard this afternoon—will he ask them to reconsider their position with regard to the political talks as well as considering the important problem of security, which he announced as being the main item of discussion? We must bear in mind that the problem of security is tied up with the political problems, that those problems will be with us now and after the election and that the people of Ireland themselves must ultimately resolve them. To that extent, our election, although important for us all, is irrelevant to the present troubles in Northern Ireland.

The dead bear witness to the failure of the political process. Terrorists divide the community by fear. Constitutional politicians can, by their actions, bind those wounds. Those politicians from Northern Ireland have an awesome responsibility. It is for those of us who represent parties on this island to encourage them, and we should encourage them to grasp now the invitation that has been given to them by the Secretary of State to meet the Prime Minister. I trust that they will accept it and that it will be not just to security but also to political matters that they will turn their attention.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his expression of sympathy on behalf of the Opposition. I am sure that the whole House appreciates his reminder of the constructive developments which have taken place in Belfast since the start of the year, and which appear in the foreground against the terrible backdrop that I have described. I am grateful to him as well, and I believe that the whole House is, for his reiteration of the Chief Constable's view about the state of affairs in the Province and his recognition that we, like the Chief Constable, are talking about a long haul.

The hon. Gentleman asked me four specific questions. The first related to the resources available to the Chief Constable. Of course, there is continuing dialogue between ourselves and the Royal Ulster Constabulary about the resources necessary for it. I can state with confidence from this Dispatch Box that there is no gap between ourselves and the RUC in terms of such resources.

In terms of reinforcements being immediately available on the military side, I should remind the House that on seven separate occasions in the past 14 months the number of troops in the Province has been augmented in different ways. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, who is present today, has always been responsive to propositions which I have put to him.

On the Nelson affair and the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that I should make a statement on it, he knows that there is not an inclination in the House to go widely into matters of an intelligence nature and that they are best dealt with in more confidential circumstances. I of course give him an assurance that lessons to be learned from the Nelson affair will be learned and acted upon.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about the proposed meeting between the Prime Minister and the leaders of the political parties and expressed his hope that the Prime Minister would ask them to reconsider getting back into talks. Those of us who have been engaged in such conversations in the past have shown mutual respect in recognising the realities with which each party has to deal. I have no doubt that the conversation that we have with the Prime Minster will be wide-ranging and I share with the hon. Gentleman the view that dialogue is all to the good. I salute and thank the leaders of the political parties for having always been ready in the course of the past two years to engage in dialogue both with me and, after appropriate negotiations, with each other.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know the great interest in the House in this matter, but we have an important debate in front of us and I shall have, in any event, to put a limit on speeches. I will allow questions to go on until 4.40 pm, when we must move on. I hope that if questions are brief I shall be able to call all hon. Members.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): I beg my right hon. Friend not to underrate the seriousness of the present situation. The Province is quite close to sliding into civil war between the communities, and if that happens the security forces will find it difficult to hold the ring between them. I ask my right hon. Friend one simple question. Is it a fact that the intelligence community—the security forces—know the identity of the godfathers who are promoting terrorism? If so, what is the valid reason for not interning them?

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend asked me not to underrate the seriousness of the present situation. Those who have followed recent events have all been fully seized of the seriousness of the situation today. There is always a hazard, as in other matters, that, in terms of a borderline, coolness may be mistaken for complacency. I give my right hon. Friend the absolute assurance that nobody on the Treasury Bench is in the remotest bit complacent about those matters. Equally, it is important that members of the Treasury Bench, like the community in Northern Ireland, should keep their nerve when confronted by such events.

As to the intelligence community and the knowledge of those engaged in terrorism, of course it is the case that a significant number of those engaged in terrorism are known to the security forces. It is also worth remarking that between 40 per cent. and 50 per cent. of those charged with terrorist crimes have no previous terrorist traces. On the culminating part of my right hon. Friend's question, internment is an option on the statute book available to the Government, but, as my right hon. Friend knows, we do not say more about it than that, since in any case its principal virtue is that of surprise.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Can the Secretary of State tell the House whether the Cabinet Committee that supervised and eventually approved the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement asked the chiefs of staff and the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to counter the inevitable violence that was inspired by the then Prime Minister, when she used those awful words at Hillsborough, on the signing of the agreement:

> "I entered into this agreement because I was not prepared to tolerate a situation of continuing violence."

Six years on from that partial surrender to violence, and in the light of the remarks of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), does the Secretary of State agree that that fatal signal by the former Prime Minister must be reversed? That must be done in political terms. Does the right hon. Gentleman therefore agree that the Prime Minister's invitation to Northern Ireland party leaders might pave the way to the restoration of political and constitutional stability in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: The right hon. Gentleman raises matters which go back over six or seven years and which the House has frequently debated. I know the strength of feeling that relates to them, but I would not accept at this Dispatch Box the strictures that the right hon. Gentleman made about my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) in her discharge of the premiership of this land in relation to Northern Ireland affairs.

As to the meeting with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I strongly take the view myself that only good can come of it in terms of a mutuality of understanding of the realities by all those involved.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Secretary of State reaffirm to the House today that for more than 20 years no local politician has had any responsibility whatsoever for security measures, or how the security forces work, in Northern Ireland? The House took those responsibilities away from the Stormont Government, saying, "We are well able to handle the situation. We will show you how it is to be done." For 20 years, that has been done, and there is the impasse that we have at present. Will the Secretary of State please exonerate Northern Ireland right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House who are blamed by other right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House for being responsible for something for which they have no responsibility? That must be made plain by the Secretary of State, to keep his credibility with the elected representatives of Northern Ireland.

Will the Secretary of State also tell us how many meetings he and his predecessors have had with the Dublin Government? We have been told in the House that, if the Dublin and British Governments met around the table and no longer shouted at each other, they could cure the situation in Northern Ireland. How many meetings has the right hon. Gentleman had, and has he achieved peace, stability or reconciliation? How could he do so when the entire Unionist population were ignored in the signing of the Anglo-Irish diktat?

I welcome the fact that at long last, after 20 years, a British Prime Minister has said, "I will meet the leaders; let us talk about the situation." That is at least one breakthrough. I trust that we shall introduce some realism, and will not accuse people who have no responsibility for security policy.

Mr. Brooke: In a formal sense, what the hon. Gentleman says about the responsibility of Northern Ireland Members, in the context of security, is perfectly correct. They exercise their proper representative right, in the House and elsewhere, in probing in the context of security policy, commenting on it and giving a lead within the community.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the issue of blame. I believe that he may have been alluding in part to the fact that there have been moments when we have not engaged in direct dialogue. All who engaged in last year's talks recognised that the talks were not peace talks per se, but I believe that we all believed that they were constructive in intent, and I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his participation in them.

I meet the Government of the Republic in the intergovernmental conference under the agreement. My guess is that, in one way or another, I have had about a score of meetings in the two and a half years in which I have held my present office. Of course I recognise—it is self-evident, in terms of the overall position—that slow progress is being made in bringing terrorism to an end. I do not make too much of a point of this, because I recognise that it is not of itself a uniquely persuasive fact, but the weapons which Gaddafi provided to the IRA from the mid-1980s onwards have also played a very significant part in the course of the conflict since then.

Finally, let me thank the hon. Gentleman most warmly for what he said about the Prime Minister's initiative.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Let me offer my sympathy to all the families who have been bereaved in the recent past. May I, on behalf of my party leader, respond very positively and very quickly to the proposal for a meeting to be called by the Prime Minister? Our party leader will certainly be there, and we look forward to the dialogue.

Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the current difficulties with the whole process is the fact that, if the political process in the north of Ireland is singled out for blame for the failure of the talks, we are diminishing that political process, which must and should be nurtured? Should we not remember that it is the Government here, and every hon. Member in the House, who have had responsibility for affairs in the north of Ireland for the past 20 years, along with the Government and political parties in the Republic? Surely, if we are to secure peace and create a new stability, all those factors must work together.

May I almost demean myself by once again making a plea to the people who are organising violence in the north of Ireland? Will they have the moral and political courage to stand up and tell their followers that they are telling them one great lie, and that nothing will ever be achieved through violence except the suffering that they have heaped on Northern Ireland? Have they the courage to call it off? Have they the courage to end the suffering and violence? If not, the political process, as represented by all of us, will have to solve the problem.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said about his party's response to the Prime Minister's initiative. I concur with him about the patience required in the political process of working one with another to solve the problems. With the exception of one problem that is created by the present election, we have, with time, among us and between us, been able to solve each of the problems that we have collectively been set. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the contribution that politics and the political process will make to bringing peace to Northern Ireland. I confirm absolutely that, if the terrorists believe that their objective will be secured by the means that they are using, they are hopelessly and wholly deluded.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): May I express sympathy for the relatives of those who have been murdered since the new year began? At this time of heartrending sadness, may I acquaint the Secretary of State with a poem written by a 14-year-old schoolboy who belongs to the legion of youth that has grown up in the shadow of terrorism and never known peace during their lives? The poem is entitled, "A prayer for the children". My young constituent, Neal Coey, declares, in reference to terrorists and terrorism:

"After all these years it has to cease.
For the children's sake, leave us in peace."

I think that everyone in the House will concur with the remarks of that schoolboy.

The Secretary of State is aware that I was excluded by him from the talks that he initiated, despite the fact that I frequently asked to be involved. I understand that I was excluded because it was felt that if I took part it would damage the Conservative opponent in my constituency, who had attacked not only the talks but the Government for initiating them.

Even though I have been excluded from the official invitation from No. 10 Downing street, I declare here and now that I am prepared to talk to any Northern Ireland constitutional politician, to go anywhere and to see anyone in Northern Ireland in the cause of peace and in the search for political progress and stability.

Mr. Brooke: The House will have been moved by the poem that the hon. Gentleman read out after expressing his sympathy to the families who have been bereaved. As a consequence of actions of my own, I have had considerable correspondence from across the Province in recent weeks and a moving feature of it has been the contributions from the very young and the very old, as well as others.

On the hon. Gentleman's non-participation in the recent talks, there was a faint element of a conspiracy theory in his suggestion as to how that might have come about. I endorse absolutely his willingness to make a constructive contribution whenever an opportunity is afforded.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): On behalf of my party, I join in the expressions of sympathy for the many families that have been bereaved in Northern Ireland in recent weeks. I welcome the invitation by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to all the constitutional parties to join in talks. Does the Secretary of State agree that ordinary people—non-politicians—in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland hope and expect that all the constitutional parties will join in those talks with genuine determination?

Does he agree that whatever sectarian differences remain, however strong, should disappear into the background, as against the great need to bring to an end the maniacal violence in Northern Ireland? Does he also agree that the long-term future of Northern Ireland depends on the rule of law—just laws, fairly enforced?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for his sympathy. As for his expression of opinion within the wider polity, I have no doubt that he represents it correctly. There is a great fund of good will within the country towards the people of Northern Ireland and a desire to see matters resolved. I endorse absolutely his concluding remarks on the rule of law.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): Does my right hon. Friend agree that at the moment, through no fault of his, there is a political vacuum, during which violence will continue and most probably increase? In the admirable talks, which we all support, will he ensure that it is made clear to political leaders in the Province that they can at least in part govern their Province, if they want, and that they might, for the sake of us all and for all electorates and communities in Northern Ireland, agree to talk about it sooner rather than later?

Mr. Brooke: As the talks in which we have latterly been engaged have taken place over the past couple of years but the violence stretches back more than 20 years, it would be a mistake to link vacuum and violence too closely. But my hon. Friend is right in believing that the efforts of constitutional politicians to make progress are inherently worth while, as we patently will not reach a conclusion, a settlement and a solution without those talks.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Does the Secretary of State agree that the response today of those who have spoken for the Unionist tradition has been deeply depressing? They almost said that the present situation is the inevitable product of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which is almost to justify it, and they use the present situation to justify their political project of seeking to get rid of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Will he join me in appealing to them to accept that there will be no progress unless they stop harking back to Stormont? Those were days of bigotry, discrimination and misuse of the security forces in Northern Ireland, which helps to explain the current crisis. We shall not progress unless they are willing to seek full equality and justice in Northern Ireland and to accept that the British and Irish Governments must co-operate if we are ever to achieve peace in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I must say to the hon. Lady—I do so in the context of what we have been seeking to do among the constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland—that I am not sure that questioning, not necessarily in a complimentary manner, the motivation and objectives of other parties is the swiftest way to make progress. The willingness to participate in multistrand talks was wholly evidenced by the participation of the parties last year and their willingness to contemplate taking up the process with the same structures after the election.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I welcome the news of the proposed talks with the Prime Minister, but is my right hon. Friend leaving out of account the one agency which, more than any other, encourages terrorism in Northern Ireland—the constitutional claim of the Irish Republic over Northern Ireland? The IRA claims that it is simply doing by violence what the Irish constitution, according to the Supreme Court, says is a constitutional imperative. Surely the time has come for the British Government officially to approach the Irish Government and say, "Drop this criminal and impossible claim"?

Mr. Brooke: The response of the Irish Government to the Provisional IRA in connection with their constitution is patently a matter for that Government and not for me. I have indicated my attitude to articles 2 and 3 in the context of the matters which we are discussing. One encouraging feature of our progress last year was the absolute willingness of everyone concerned to see everything relevant on the table, including articles 2 and 3 of the constitution.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): It goes without saying that my party regrets every death from terrorism in Northern Ireland, irrespective of whence the violence comes. I am disappointed none the less that the Secretary of State did not have more to say about the security forces and the work they do so courageously in Northern Ireland in fighting terrorism. I am disappointed that he did not acknowledge that the off-duty policeman, to whom he referred in his statement, was mentally disturbed; that was not made clear. To fail to do so tends to besmirch the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Why in his statement did not the Secretary of State mention how he intends to deal with the command and control structure, the higher echelon, within the terrorist organisations, who for years have walked the streets of our towns with impunity, and who have carried out, organised and continue to organise the murders throughout the years? One of the young people who died during the last week was a constituent of mine. Yesterday evening, another, only by great personal courage, managed to save his own life.

The Secretary of State must join us in paying tribute to those who have withstood the violence. He must not try to distract people from those who are guilty of the violence by talking about what local politicians might do. My party leader will be delighted to meet him and the Prime Minister, but we cannot have the House and the public at large being led to believe that those of us who work 18 hours a day, seven days a week, with the vast majority of the population on both sides supporting us, are somehow to blame for what is the responsibility of a handful of self-appointed assassins whom the Government have not yet been able to take out of society.

Mr. Brooke: I welcome particularly the hon. Gentleman's condemnation of terrorism and of the consequences of terrorism, from whatever source it comes. The whole House will welcome the fact that he did that so unreservedly on behalf of his party.

Yesterday in the Province I alluded to the mental condition of the off-duty policeman. I said that that death too was a tragedy which embraced and encompassed us all, and that none of us could know what was in the mind of that young man when he went to the Sinn Fein advice centre.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to pay tribute to the security forces and the unremitting work which is done day in, day out, and night in, night out across the Province. In the heat of the moment earlier in the week, the hon. Gentleman referred to the Government as gutless in not being prepared to pursue internment. He might on reflection agree that all of us involved in Northern Ireland—whether in the security forces, as elected representatives, or even as Ministers—require a fair amount of intestinal fortitude in order to grapple with the problems with which we are faced.

[Mr. Brooke]

As to the hon. Gentleman's endorsement of internment, of which he is a powerful advocate, while I recognise that he thinks that it is a lack of guts which is causing it not to be brought in, other commentators who take a balanced view of the issue think that it might be reckless to embark on it. Both considerations need to be taken into account.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Does the Secretary of State agree with me that there is no place in any civilised society for terrorism? Does he agree also that 25 deaths in 30 days represent a despicable line of deaths and sorrow in the Province? Does he also accept that many in the law-abiding community within the Province are fed up and frustrated with the statements that we will have security reviews and that there is no quick fix for security. Surely a community which has waited 22 years, begging for peace, cannot be blamed for looking for a quick fix.

Some silly people seek to give credence to the idea that the politicians are to blame. Do they not realise that they place politicians in Northern Ireland in greater danger of their lives than ever before from terrorist thugs? Very few hon. Members understand what it is like for people and their elected representatives to live day after day in the shadow of the bomb and the bullet. When we go out to do our ordinary constituency work, we realise that we may be blown to bits. Instead of listening to so-called platitudes, sympathy, lectures and gimmicks, is it not time that the people of Ulster got their basic British right—peace and the right to live?

Mr. Brooke: The whole House will join me in expressing to the hon. Gentleman sympathy because of outrages and atrocities which have been committed in his constituency and which have caused constituents of his to lose their lives. I recognise the intensity of the experience that the hon. Gentleman has had so often in going into homes which have been bereaved by the loss of the breadwinner or the son of the family, and the feeling that he must have, because, as his hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said, he does not have direct responsibility for these matters and wonders how he can offer comfort against the security position. I have to reiterate from the Dispatch Box that the rule of law is critical to the eventual triumph over terrorism.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry that I have not been able to call all hon. Members who wish to speak. It will be legitimate to raise the subject again on the Army Bill which is to be debated next Thursday.

BILL PRESENTED

ARMY

Mr. Secretary King, supported by Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Archie Hamilton, Mr. Alan Clark, Dr. Brian Mawhinney and Mr. Kenneth Carlisle, presented a Bill to provide for members of the Ulster Defence Regiment to cease to be members of that Regiment at the end of June 1992; to provide for the amendment of section 2 of the Armed Forces Act 1966 in relation to service in Northern Ireland; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 68.]

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That the Matter of the proposals of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, being a Matter relating exclusively to Scotland, be referred to the Scottish Grant Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Homeless People (Eviction)

4.48 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you have had a request from the Secretary of State for the Environment regarding the impending eviction tomorrow of 90 homeless people from a refuge at Waterloo road ambulance station, which is owned by Hill Samuel, bankers. The company is taking the people to court tomorrow to get an eviction order so that it may throw them on to the street. It is high time the Government had a Minister here to make a statement about stopping the eviction and telling the Government's friends, the bankers Hill Samuel, not to throw those 90 people out on the street.

Mr. Speaker: What the hon. Gentleman has said will have been heard. No doubt he would have raised that matter during business questions if he had been fortunate enough to be called.

Opposition Day

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Industry (Government Policies)

4.49 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the Government's economic mismanagement which has caused a second recession bringing unacceptably high levels of bankruptcies, closures and job losses in every sector of industry, and the fastest rising unemployment in Europe hitting every occupation, industry and area of the United Kingdom; condemns the Government's neglect of the needs of the unemployed and training generally and the deliberate rundown of regional policies in Scotland, Wales and the regions of England; and calls urgently for policies that take seriously the needs of industry in order to halt the huge decline in investment, to create jobs, and to improve skills.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. In view of the late start and the number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock. If hon. Members who are called before 7 o'clock are brief, and if the Front-Bench spokesmen do not take too long, it may be possible to relax the limit.

Mr. Brown: The motion states that the Government have created and compounded, but are failing to correct, a recession which threatens not only a short-term rise in unemployment but a long-term loss of industrial capacity and strength for Britain. The motion calls for action, with a new skills fund for training so that we can have the best-educated, best-trained and best-skilled work force in Europe. It calls for action on unemployment so that we can halt the fastest rising unemployment in western Europe and for action on investment with a new investment incentive, which we and others including the Confederation of British Industry have advocated, backed by an industry policy for Britain—in contrast to a Government who cannot be trusted with the economy and have no policy for Britain but to repeat the mistakes of the past.

With 3,000 jobs being lost almost every day, 1,000 businesses going under every week and sales, investment and employment still falling, let us recall the background to the debate. The Chancellor told us that we would have recovery within three months. That was on 11 March 1991, 11 months ago, since when 700,000 men and women have lost their jobs. The Government should apologise for misleading the House and the country.

The Chancellor then told us that he had seen "vague stirrings" of recovery which no one but he could see. That was on 2 June 1991, more than eight months ago, since when 35,000 companies have gone under. The Government should admit that Ministers were at best economical with the truth about the economy, and they should apologise to all who have suffered.

Then, the Prime Minister told us that recovery was "coming in weeks". That was on 19 June 1991, more than seven months ago, since when another £500 million in manufacturing capacity has been lost. The Prime Minister should apologise to companies and to work forces which have suffered for what one might call, in American terminology, past statements that are no longer operative.

The Chancellor then told us that he could see the "green shoots of spring". That was on 9 October 1991, five months ago, during which time manufacturing investment has fallen by another few hundred million pounds. The Ministers here today should tell us what they are going to do to make amends to all who have suffered.

Finally, the Prime Minister told James Naughtie on "The World at One" that the recovery had started "as we speak". That was on 1 January, more than a month ago. He should apologise for a confident statement which has turned out to be a terminological inexactitude at the least. A Government who were wrong in March were wrong in May, June, July, August and December, and they are wrong now. If the Government had the courage and were not running scared, we would be settling these matters not in a Thursday Commons debate but in a Thursday general election. It is because the Government will not admit that they have been wrong all along that they can do nothing to put the economy right.

What of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry? Conservative Members—especially those from the north-west where redundancies have risen by 20,000 in the past six months, from the midlands, where unemployment is rising by nearly 10,000 every month, from the south, where unemployment has shot up by 20,000, and from Scotland and Wales—will be surprised that, not to be outdone, the Secretary of State issued a press release from Conservative central office in the autumn when addressing what is called the World Economic Forum at the Hyde Park hotel.

What did the Secretary of State say? Did he say that the Conservatives accepted responsibility for the British recession? No. The headline of his press release of 3 September 1991 was "Conservatives lead the way to world recovery". I could understand the headline, "Conservatives led the way to British recession" but not "Conservatives lead the way to world recovery". They are inventing a British recovery that does not yet exist, all because they will not accept responsibility for a British recession which is of their own making. Because they will not accept responsibility for the problem, they are disabled from taking the action necessary for its solution.

The facts are——

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that he is fast becoming the Ron Glum of British politics? I believe that he has never managed a company or been in a position in which he needed to motivate workers. The sort of talk that we hear from him, which is wholly contrary to what we hear from the CBI and others, will progressively talk down British industry. Is that what the Labour party is all about?

Mr. Brown: It is not I who am talking down British industry—it is British industry which wants a Government who will tell the truth about the British economy.

These are the facts. Exactly a year after the Chancellor predicted that we would have a recovery by the middle of 1991, eight months after the Prime Minister told us that a recovery would start in a few weeks, and months after the Chancellor detected the green shoots of spring, employment is still falling by more than 30,000 a month, manufacturing employment is still falling by nearly 20,000

[Mr. Brown]

a month, sales are falling, industrial production is falling and, worst of all, the key to our future—investment—is falling this month and next month and, if the hon. Gentleman listens to the CBI, he will learn that unless the Government take action, it is likely to fall during the year.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): The hon. Gentleman obviously agrees that it is in manufacturing engineering that the greatest problems have arisen as a result of the recession. A company with which I am involved has lost a large part of its turnover in the past year, largely as a result of the fact that its manufacturing was done for American companies which, because of the recession in America, have taken the manufacturing back to America, thus depriving this country of it. Is it not because there is a world recession and, in particular, a recession in America, that we have the problems that we have now? It is my experience that there has been a recovery in the past couple of months and, in the company with which I am involved, it is British-led. It is British workmanship which is leading us out of it.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman makes the point that the Prime Minister has been trying to make for a few days. *[Interruption.]* Let us deal with that point. He is saying that the problems in Britain arose not because of anything intrinsic to the British economy but because of a world recession. Why, if these problems are not intrinsic to Britain but part of a world recession, has Britain been bottom of the league of European Community countries for output, investment, employment and growth in 1991? Why, even in 1992, is the latest forecast that we shall be 12 out of 12 for employment in Europe?

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): As the hon. Gentleman is so dissatisfied with industrial performance in this country, will he cast his mind back to the balmy days when Labour was last in power, when British Airways was rated below Aeroflot by its customers, when British Leyland was the butt of international jokes and when British Steel was the world's largest loss maker? Bearing in mind the fact that he has never manufactured anything except dodgy policies, how does he expect to do better?

Mr. Brown: And when we had a surplus in manufacturing trade with the rest of the world. The hon. Gentleman, who repeats the same question every time, would do well to read the manifesto that he issued to the electors of Amber Valley, which said that the Conservative Government had put an end to fast-rising prices once and for all—just before inflation doubled.

Let us deal with the world recession. When Conservative Members claim—as the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) has just done—that this is a world recession in which all countries are somehow suffering equally and try to tell us that it is not a British recession which is the fault of Ministers but a world recession which has nothing to do with them, let us be clear about the facts.

With the European Community as a whole growing by 1·4 per cent. in 1991 and expected to grow 2·1 per cent. in 1992, there is no falling output and therefore no recession in the EC as a whole last year or forecast for this year. With the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as a whole growing by 1·2 per cent. in 1991 and expected to grow 2·2 per cent. in 1992, there is not falling output and, therefore, no recession in the OECD countries as a whole last year or forecast for this year. When the G7 as a whole——

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman has been complaining for the last few moments about a lack of investment. How on earth would British industry be helped by investment policy if his party got the opportunity to introduce its 9 per cent. tax on savings income? How would that help investment?

Mr. Brown: The policies that we advocate for manufacturing industry have been welcomed by the CBI, and are similar to the policies—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are determined that I shall not be heard.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The debate has been going on for only a few minutes. I suggest that hon. Members on both sides of the House sit back and listen.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I can tell the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) that Budget submissions from the CBI, the Engineering Employers Federation, and many chambers of commerce and other industrial organisations, advocate a new investment incentive for British industry, to get the economy moving out of recession.

It is remarkable that the Chancellor of the Exchequer——

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way again.

It is remarkable that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will not rule out personal tax cuts or cuts in inheritance tax in the Budget, yet even before he began his Budget discussions, he specifically ruled out, in front of the National Economic Development Council, the one measure about which there is a consensus in industry—a new industrial investment incentive to get the economy moving again.

If Conservative Members would stop being completely embattled by their ideology, they might be able to learn from British industry.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, and that is the last time.

Mr. Hill: I have listened intently to what the hon. Gentleman has said about the OECD reports. I can give him a practical example, if he wishes. My daughter and her husband run a company just outside Bordeaux, in France. In the past few months, the recession there has been far worse than they have ever experienced before. One should take in some of those practical facts instead of listening only to statistics.

Mr. Brown: If the hon. Gentleman wants to make such points, perhaps he should go round the regions and listen to British industry. Perhaps he should read the report about machine tool orders—new orders are 47 per cent.

down over a year. That is the result not of a world recession but of mistakes that have been made here in Britain.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way again.

Let us be absolutely clear: business investment last year did not fall in the EC as a whole in the G7 countries or in the OECD countries, but it fell in Britain. Employment did not fall in the EC, the G7 countries or in the OECD countries as a whole either, but it fell in Britain.

The Prime Minister tells us that Japan is in recession. Let me tell him, and Conservative Members, that, according to the latest report, in 1992 investment there is expected to rise by 2·4 per cent., employment by 1·3 per cent., and output by 2·4 per cent. That comes on top of a position in which, last year, business investment rose by 7 per cent., employment by 2 per cent., and output by 4·5 per cent. There is no recession in Japan, where the economy is growing, not declining, and unemployment is at 2·2 per cent., compared with 9 per cent. here.

Where is the world recession when the Prime Minister needs it? There is no world recession. Surely the only conclusion—*[Interruption.]* Let us see what the IMF says. It says that the world economy grew by just 1 per cent. in 1991, but that it will grow by 2·8 per cent. this year. There is no fall in output in the world as a whole, and there is no recession. Where is the world recession? There is none. The only conclusion must be that the Prime Minister is condemned as—in his own words—economically illiterate.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): The hon. Gentleman says that there is no world recession. Has he seen the statistics coming out of the United States? There is a recession there.

Secondly—*[Interruption.]* Has the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) finished? Secondly, if our economy

Mr. Brown: We had better examine the overall level of investment in the economy. At the beginning of 1990, manufacturing investment was £12 billion on a year-to-year basis. It is now £8 billion—that represents a 35 per cent. fall in manufacturing investment. If that is not evidence of a recession that needs correcting by Government action, I do not know what is.

This is a recession initiated in Britain by Ministers, and prolonged in Britain because of their mistakes. It is a recession which, thanks to the Government, still shows no sign of ending.

What about the future? The CBI says that, unless action is taken, investment will continue to fall in 1992, and that, on the eve of the single market, investment will have fallen by 35 per cent. over two years. What does that mean in practice? It means that this year the Germans will invest about £3,000 for each manufacturing worker, and the Italians and the Americans about the same. The Dutch will invest more than £6,000. Yet no more than £1,800 will be invested in each British manufacturing worker. Britain has more to do, because it has done less over the past 13 years, yet Britain will invest 50 per cent. less than the Germans and the French, and less than half what the Japanese and some other countries invest. And the Prime Minister says that we have had a manufacturing renaissance in this country.

The Chancellor's autumn statement, in November, said that output would grow by 2·5 per cent. Now the consensus is that it will grow by about half that rate in 1992. He said that investment would increase by 1·2 per cent. The consensus now—he has admitted it himself—is that those figures were over-optimistic, and that, according to the latest forecast, investment could fall. The autumn statement said that manufacturing production would rise by 2 per cent. The consensus now is that it will stagnate over the coming months.

Hon. Members will recall the night when a lady from Hampshire was told by Michael Fish, the weather forecaster, that there would be no hurricane. Michael Fish is remembered for one colossal failure of prediction, but the Chancellor's record is rather different. The right hon. Gentleman's record is remarkable for its consistency—he gets it wrong every time. The one thing that we can say about the Chancellor is that he is utterly reliable—he will always let you down.

How can we trust the judgment of people who tell us that there will not be a recession, and then, when it is upon us, that there is no recession? How can we trust the judgment of men who tell us successively that the recession will have ended by spring 1991, June 1991, autumn 1991, December 1991 and January 1992, and who are even now telling us that it is all over, when the evidence is against them?

How can we trust the Government's judgment, when they are the very same people who in 1988 told us that they had created an economic miracle? They are the people who encouraged others to act as if they had no worries about borrowing, and who failed to warn about the risks—even, in some cases, to family homes—of debt, recession and high interest rates. Even as things got worse for millions of people, those men denied that there was a problem.

How can we trust the judgement of men who told us that their 1988 Budget, which gave £4 billion to the very rich, would increase output, growth, productivity, incentives, and even charitable giving? All of those have fallen as a result of Government mistakes in the past three years.

The Government are the people who have the audacity to put up billboards around Britain, in a campaign built round one central theme—that one cannot trust Labour. It is not the Labour party which has misled the country and cannot be trusted; it is the Conservative Government who have forfeited any trust.

What is leading the recovery that we hear about from the Prime Minister? Is it housing-led, as the Chancellor promised? The Council of Mortgage Lenders has just said that there is no housing recovery. Is it retail-led, when companies such as John Lewis say that they are dealing with the worst conditions for 30 years? Is it construction-led, as the Chancellor hinted that it would be, when the construction industry says that it will not recover until 1993?

Is the recovery consumer-led, as the Chancellor promised at one stage, when in January, trade sales figures are stagnating and in some cases falling? Is it industry-led? Is it manufacturing-led? Is it investment-led? No. The truth is that if there is a recovery, it is not investment-led or industry-led; it is a Conservative central office-led recovery.

[Mr. Brown]

It is a recovery led by press releases, buoyed up by mistaken forecasts and advancing on the crest of a wave of pre-election hype. It is a recovery led not by car makers or aeroplane makers, but simply by phrase makers. The only companies talking it up are the Conservative advertising companies. This recovery leaves hundreds more companies going under, thousands more family homes repossessed and hundreds of thousands more unemployed. Is it an ICI-led recovery? Is it a GEC-led recovery? Is it a Wimpey-led recovery, or is it simply a Saatchi and Saatchi-led recovery?

It is a recovery dreamed up over a working breakfast and sketched by the Saatchi image makers. It is a recovery that begins and ends as advertising copy. It is a recovery that reaches as far as the nation's billboards, but not to its high streets, jobcentres or dole queues. It is a recovery led not by commercial activity, but simply by commercials. It is a recovery that has created a few jobs in a small section of Smith square in the press relations department, of Conservative central office, but none in any offices or factories throughout the country. After 13 years in government, the Conservatives are no longer asking how they can achieve better growth, better investment or better employment prospects. Their highest aspiration in government is simply better advertising in the run-up to the election.

What does Saatchi and Saatchi, whose good news machine proclaims that the economy is prospering, actually say about the real state of the economy to the people who matter to it most—the shareholders? Does Saatchi and Saatchi report to its shareholders that the Conservative Government are performing well, that Britain is best off with the Tories and that the recession is merely a blip?

Let me read the annual report of Saatchi and Saatchi. The chief executive says——

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman would do well to listen—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not want to hear.

Let me read the chief executive's report. He says:

> "I do not expect trading to be any easier this year than last. The length of and the severity of the current recession are unresolved."

That is Saatchi and Saatchi reporting to the people who matter to it—the shareholders. It says that there is recession, that it is severe and that its length is unresolved. That is bad news indeed, but presumably it is, in the Prime Minister's words, just another prophet of doom and just dismal Jimmy Saatchi at it again.

Not even the messengers believe the message. What does the other Tory propaganda machine—the *Daily Mail* —tell us about the recession and recovery? Let us look at its headlines in the past few months, which include "Britain bounces back", and

> "Small firms defy the prophets of doom".

What did the owners of the *Daily Mail* report when clear thinking was needed because their own directors' fees, dividends and salaries were at stake? Did they say, "Britain doing well, likely to do better, prospering and nothing to worry about"?

I quote from the report of Associated Newspapers plc:

> "Such limited signs of recovery in the United Kingdom economy as are visible remain patchy and do not give us any grounds for optimism . . . The first months of the financial year have not indicated any recovery from recession."

The owners tell millions of their readers the good news from the Tory party while admitting in private, for all practical purposes of their own, that the news is bad.

What about the *Daily Express*? In November, its headlines said:

> "At last we have lift off. Economy up."

Surely that encourages couples to bid up for their homes and encourages families to think that their debt problems are over. What does Lord Stevens tell his shareholders? He does not speak about signs of lift-off at the annual general meeting. He stated specifically:

> "Contrary to the optimism of Government Ministers that the economy is turning, there are so far few tangible signs the advertising volumes . . . are picking up."

The people who ask us to believe in the Tory record do not even believe it themselves.

What about *The Sun*? It uses headlines such as, "It's looking good", "Britain on the way" and "We're OK in the UK". It then says: "It that's depression let's have more of it."

But what does News International plc report to its shareholders in its most recent annual report on 9 September? It said:

> "Economic conditions as they affect the media are not expected to improve during the next year."

Its best assessment of our economic prospects to the people who matter to it is that there will be no recovery for a year—until next September. Yet News International is happy to put the interests of the Tory party before the interests of its readers.

Mr. Tim Bell is always ready to tell the good news on billboards, in full-page advertisements and in party political broadcasts. What did his company say about the real world of business at Christmas, only a month ago? It said that the company was having to make a last, desperate attempt to make any profits this year.

Here we have it. The entire Conservative propaganda machine—central office, Saatchi and Saatchi, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and Tim Bell—the whole ministry of truth, when pressed, makes a sharp distinction between the message it puts to voters and the one that goes back to the directors and shareholders when serious commercial interests are at stake. There is one truth for the public, whom the Conservative propaganda machine is prepared to deceive, and another truth for the directors, the shareholders and the City audience on which it depends.

The public are being treated with contempt by people who know exactly what is wrong with the economy. They admit it to themselves every day and then proclaim a completely different story—a wholly different account—to the public in multi-million-pound Conservative advertising campaigns. Perhaps that deceit, that self-interest and that hypocrisy are nothing remarkable, but simply the prerogative of the Tory press throughout the ages. Saatchi and Saatchi say, "You can't trust Labour." All the evidence is that one cannot trust what Saatchi and Saatchi says about Labour, about the economy or about the Tory party.

Even within the Conservative party, I came across a document entitled "The Transformation of Britain", which was described as the new mass market magazine and as the party's flagship publication. It has an introduction by the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), the Conservative party chairman. The third section entitled "The 1990s" looks at

> "the fruits of success in the lives of British people".

It is not so much the record of the Tory transformation of Britain as an attempt at the transformation of the Tory record. There is only one edition so far, but in 100 glossy pages, the magazine manages only three advertisements. One is for a Tory joke book, one is from Selfridges and one is from Arthur Andersen which says:

> "UK plc could be in better shape."

This is the Conservative party's own publication.

> "It's time to get fit again. Getting fit is hard work . . . Getting back in trim will not be easy for UK business. The exercise will be painful. Very often it means nothing less than a total restructuring."

The Tory party's house magazine is now telling us that, after 13 years of this Government——

Mr. Ian Bruce: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have read the motion carefully. Could you help the House and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)? Will it be in order for us to discuss the Labour party's proposed policies, if it came to office? We have listened to the hon. Gentleman for 32 minutes, but we have yet to hear a single policy proposal from the Labour party.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The motion is wide. If the hon. Gentleman is called, I shall be pleased to hear what he has to say.

Mr. Brown: Conservative Members do not like what they are hearing about the fable.

Do Ministers themselves believe the good news? What does the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry say when pressed in cross-examination? In an interview in the magazine *The Engineer* which has just been drawn to my attention, does he share the confidence of the Saatchi and Saatchi advertisement? Does he repeat the pre-election talk of a transformation of Britain? What did he say in that interview a few months ago? What did he say when pressed on the problems of British industry? Did he talk about a blip or say that the recovery was just about to happen? He said:

> "The problems are deep rooted and complex and only the most fundamental cultural, academic and educational changes are going to bring about reform. I think that message is getting over."

It certainly is. When the messengers do not believe the message, when the Conservatives' party propaganda cannot sustain it and when Ministers cannot hold the line, can we trust the Government? Can there be any greater deception to the millions of victims of this recession—the small business men and women, the unemployed, shopkeepers and people in manufacturing? They need to be told the truth.

The Government are conjuring up a recovery that does not exist with a propaganda machine that does not even believe in it, and all for no other reason than that they are about to be called to account in a general election. A Government who treat the electorate with contempt will be treated with contempt by the British electorate.

The problem, however, is that we are talking about the difficulties not of the past three years, but of the past 13 years. In that time, we have consistently argued for the creation of a modern manufacturing strength, training, investment in skills, technology and training, and investment in the regions. What has happened under the Government? Let us look at what has happened in the past 13 years in terms of manufacturing growth. It has risen by 26 per cent. in Germany, 33 per cent. in America and 60 per cent. in Japan, but it has risen by only 4·9 per cent. in Britain.

What about investment in manufacturing?

Sir William Clark *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I gave way to the right hon. Gentleman a few minutes ago and I answered his question.

In the past twelve and a half years, investment in manufacturing has grown in real terms by 47 per cent. in Germany, by 52 per cent. in France, by 73 per cent. in Italy and by more than 100 per cent. in the Netherlands. However, it has fallen in Britain under this Government. We have the worst record for growth in manufacturing of all the OECD countries, with the exception of Greece. We have the worst record for manufacturing investment bar none. That is the Government's record at the end of 13 years in which they had the unparalleled advantage and the once-for-all windfall of North sea oil. However, we are now investing less and hardly producing any more in our manufacturing industry than we did in 1979.

This is a Government who boasted that they created an economic miracle. No wonder they are going to the country relying not on their achievements, but only on their advertising. The last thing they want to talk about is their record. They will not act on falling investment. They have refused to listen to the Confederation of British Industry and other organisations that have demanded a change in policy. While other countries are making proper preparations for 1992, the Government have done absolutely nothing to improve investment in the regions in particular.

We cannot trust the Government to take the necessary action and nowhere is that more true than in their attitude to our regions. Nowhere has the neglect of British industry and its future prospects been more obvious than in the Government's attitude to regional policy. That policy has been subject to modernisation in other countries, but it has been virtually abandoned in Britain.

Nowhere is that more true than in the Government's attitude to RECHAR and our mining communities. The reason we have not reached an agreement in Europe is that the Ministers concerned are more anxious to wage ideological war with the Commission than to secure the funds that will create jobs, improve training and help small businesses grow in many of our rundown mining communities.

The document from the Department of the Environment says that the Government's case is no longer viable and that it represents an own goal. It states that the position must change. Jobs had been lost and help to small businesses had already been delayed when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry told the House of Lords Select Committee:

> "The problem is a metaphysical one. It is a metaphysical dispute about additionality".

Is it a metaphysical problem when Ministers put a miner of 47 on the dole with no prospect of ever working again and block the very measures that would help him?

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether he has ever asked his former right hon. Friend, Commissioner Millan, who was

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

Secretary of State for Scotland, to operate the same rules as we do? Is Mr. Millan quite content to hand over that money to create those jobs or is the hon. Gentleman trying his best to dissuade him from doing so now?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that the rules on regional policy were changed in 1988.

Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman what his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said in his document. He said that the current arrangement is not transparent, that it is not additional, that it does not satisfy the objectives of grant recipients, and that it is not neutral. He actually admitted that the political criticism had not been met and that Britain was virtually isolated in the Community. That is what the Secretary of State for the Environment said from within the Government of which the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is a member.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman failed to read out the sentence that says that none of those comments refer to RECHAR.

Mr. Brown: The precise reading of that document is:

"This leaves the RECHAR programmes and other future ERDF receipts in jeopardy".

The right hon. Gentleman clearly does not talk to the Secretary of State for the Environment, and he does not even read the documents that come before him.

Is it a metaphysical problem when miners and their families who have travelled throughout Scotland and the north, and from Scotland to Yorkshire and further south and are faced not just with the prospect of unemployment, but of no further employment opportunities because the RECHAR money is being blocked? They are communities not of metaphysicians, but of miners and former miners laid low by closures and devastated by unemployment. Now, because of Government intransigence, they are deprived even of hope, at least until the Labour Government come to power.

How can we trust the Government to help mining communities or any of the hard-hit regions in Scotland, Wales and England, when they have cut regional assistance, axed regional development grants and will not back European regional measures? Our regional policy is now being presided over by a Minister who said in a pamphlet that he regards regional policy as one of the phoney activities of Government.

Nothing in the record of the Government is more damning than their failure to act on unemployment. Unemployment is now higher here than in all the Community countries except Ireland and Greece. It is still rising faster here than anywhere in Europe. That is on top of a doubling in unemployment since 1979.

What about employment action, which is a Government creation? There are only 263 people on employment action schemes in Scotland, which is an average of only three people in every constituency where employment action operates. Two years after the Government were first warned of the recession and 20 months after unemployment started to rise, employment action is offering places to 5,800 people in Britain. That is an average of nine people for constituencies which, in some cases, have more than 10,000 people unemployed. We now know that the Government have even raided the unemployment training budget in the past few days.

How can we trust a Government who say that they will help the unemployed, when the best that they can do for the 2·5 million unemployed is to create an average of only nine employment action places for every man and woman even in some of the hardest-hit constituencies in the country? No Government have the right to treat unemployed men and women with such contempt by doing virtually nothing to assist them. No Government have the right to condemn thousands of teenagers to unemployment leaving hundreds of them without training or benefits.

In the past 13 years, the Government have created neither economic efficiency nor social justice. They will be remembered as the Government who dissipated the oil wealth, left us with more unemployment, more poverty, more homelessness. They promised an economic miracle, but they have left Great Britain investing less and producing not much more from our manufacturing industries than in 1979.

The Government know that they cannot go to the country on their record. They are relying on a huge public relations offensive to conceal that record. But even their own public relations companies know that they cannot escape their record. They have undermined manufacturing by cutting investment in our future. They do not deserve another five years to do more damage. They have undermined public services as well as our industries. This Government must not have another five years to do even more damage. They have forced unemployment up by 1·5 million in 13 years and then they abandoned the unemployed even though they have had the North sea oil. They do not deserve another five years to throw more people out of work.

Britain has suffered enough. The Government do not deserve re-election. Labour will govern in their place.

5.29 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its success in bringing down inflation; recognises the importance of maintaining the fight against inflation to maintain competitiveness; acknowledges the success of British manufacturing industry in reaching record figures for exports despite depressed world markets; rejects the high tax; high spending policies of the Opposition which City forecasters predict would cause an increase in interest rates and inflation and would be an impediment to recovery; condemns their anti-industry policies of nationalisation, state control, a national minimum wage, renewed union power and unqualified support for the social charter which would have damaging consequences for jobs and industry; and notes that all these policies have been rejected by business.".

Once again, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) devoted the bulk of his speech to his choice selection of gloomy statistics, gloomier forecasts and the gloomiest quotes he can find. He overdoses on gloom. He cannot get enough of it. I fear that eventually it will consume him entirely and he will end up like one of those unfortunate old men in Oxford street between the sandwich boards proclaiming, "The end is nigh". [HON. MEMBERS: "It is."]

Several Hon. Members *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us hear the Minister.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman's speech contained not a mention of Britain's success in increasing our share of world markets for the third year running. It contained not a word about our success in exports, nothing about Britain's record low level of strikes and nothing about British industry's productivity achievements. He clearly believes that he can talk Labour support up by talking the economy down.

A key part of the process of economic recovery is the restoration of confidence and the revival of optimism. Either the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East does not recognise that, or he does not care and wants to delay and defer recovery. Fortunately, his words are unlikely to have much impact on the course of the recession, but if his party's policies were ever implemented, they would almost without exception aggravate the recession and abort recovery. Labour's plans to raise taxes would be particularly damaging. Apart from their long-term impact on incentives, their short-term effect on demand would be disastrous.

That danger was pointed out by Hamish McRae, no Tory hack, in a lucid article in *The Independent*, which is not a Tory rag. He took into account only Labour's plans to increase the top rate to 50 per cent. and to abolish the National Insurance ceiling. He wrote:

> "Labour's tax proposals would exacerbate current economic problems . . . [They] would be an economic experiment at the wrong time. At worst, it would lead to a sharp rise in personal bankruptcies. Further, by tipping house prices into a new decline, it would hit consumption and make recovery more difficult. The changes projected . . . by the Labour party . . . would mean those affected would face the sharpest ever peacetime tax increase."

He concluded:

> "Dare Labour risk kicking an economy that is already down?"

On top of that, Labour proposes to tax savings—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Lilley: How Labour Members can claim to favour investment while penalising savings baffles me, and I suspect—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down and listen to the Minister.

Mr. Tracey: Does my right hon. Friend also remember that when, a couple of years ago, the Leader of the Opposition was asked what Labour would do to control inflation, he said, "To cut a long story short, we don't know."

Mr. Lilley: I remember that extremely well. That interview has probably never been broadcast. I hope that it will receive an airing soon.

It is not just domestic savings and domestic investment that the Labour party's policies would jeopardise. Inward investment would also be at risk from the xenophobia of the Labour movement. The TUC conference, by an overwhelming majority, condemned inward investment as alien. I have, since then, challenged the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East five times to dissociate the Labour party from that attitude. On each occasion, he has refused to disown the views of his party's paymaster. Now that some TUC leaders have backed off from that policy, surely he can do likewise. I give him the opportunity now to dissociate the Labour party from the attack on inward investment. How extraordinary—*[Interruption.]* Either he still believes——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is an intolerable House this afternoon. The Minister will give way when he wants to give way.

Mr. Lilley: I wish to give way to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, but he is uncharacteristically rooted to his seat. He refuses to withdraw his support for trade union opposition to investment into this country. The Americans have a saying, that an honest politician is one who, when he is bought, stays bought. The hon. Gentleman carries that to extremes. He stays bought even when he is being sold out. As I say, the trade unions have themselves withdrawn now from that position. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman carries integrity to the point of ineptitude.

The three conditions of sustained recovery are clear. They are low inflation, reduced interest rates and renewed confidence. Labour's policies are tailormade to undermine all three of those conditions. The Government have brought inflation down to a little more than half the lowest level ever achieved by the last Labour Government, and it is set to fall below the German level for the first time in a generation.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman about the need to reduce interest rates. With the highest level of real interest rates that we have ever had for such a long time, our balance of payments is in deficit. If he wants to reduce interest rates, how would he cure the balance of payments deficit?

Mr. Lilley: The right hon. Gentleman is a supporter of the exchange rate mechanism, so I hope that he believes that we should not recklessly reduce them. We must maintain interest rates at levels compatible with our membership of it.

But I am dealing with inflation, and Labour's policies would send inflation soaring again by their extravagant spending programmes; by the higher taxes and borrowing that would be needed to finance those programmes; by the prospect of monetary relaxation; by fears of devaluation with which every Labour Government have been associated; by their minimum wage policy, which would jack up the whole pay structure; and by strengthening trade union power, which would ratchet it up further—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East might learn a little if he would desist from the conversation that is progressing on the Opposition Front Bench, although we appreciate that he is not in the learning mode.

We have got interest rates down by 4·5 points from their peak to below the average of the last decade, and within a whisker of continental levels. City forecasters are almost unanimous that a Labour Government would be obliged to put interest rates up, both to counteract the inflationary consequences of their own policies and to maintain the pound in the exchange rate mechanism before or after devaluation. The commentators differ only about how much Labour would have to raise interest rates.

The Nomura Research Institute, for example, says:

[Mr. Lilley]

> "It seems clear that the markets would exact a price in the form of a significant interest rate premium upon the election of a Labour government. Labour would have to assuage the market's doubts by being ready to raise interest rates. An immediate rise in interest rates of 2 per cent. might have the required effect."

Credit Lyonnais is less optimistic:

> "Our simulations suggest that the higher inflation, borrowing and balance of payments deficit under Labour would push short-term interest rates sharply higher to defend the pound—by up to four percentage points by the end of four years. This raises the possibility of a mini U-turn—similar to that by the Socialist government in France in the early '80s." Of nine major research houses which have analysed the impact of a Labour Government, every one forecasts higher interest rates."

So I have a simple question for the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. If, as virtually every commentator expects, there was a run on the pound following a Labour election, would Labour put up interest rates to maintain present parity, or would it devalue? Every Labour Government have had to face that choice. If the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East cannot answer that question, I shall give him a clue. Every Labour Government have done both. They have first put up interest rates and then bottled out and devalued. The fact that the hon. Gentleman refuses to say what he would do suggests that a future Labour Government would probably follow the same path.

Recovery would be aborted not only by Labour's macro policies. Even the policies which Labour claims would boost activity would defer it—for example, its proposed temporary increase in tax allowances for investment in what it describes as "new technology" and "genuine innovation". I presume that business men would have to go to the Inland Revenue before making investments to obtain confirmation from their friendly local neighbourhood tax man that their investment met the definition of "new technology" and "genuine innovation" before they could go ahead with the investment, with the prospect of receiving higher allowances.

Imagine the Inland Revenue having to vet every item of investment in plant and machinery—some £40 billion a year—to decide whether each piece of equipment is sufficiently technically sophisticated. It is hard to imagine anything more guaranteed to defer or delay virtually every investment, but that is Labour's policy.

Labour's nationalisation plans would have a particularly adverse effect on parts of the economy that are now buoyant. Privatisation has liberated water, electricity and telecommunications from the constraints of the public sector borrowing requirement. As a result, all those industries have massive investment programmes. The water industry plans to invest £30 billion over the next few years, and its suppliers expect this to be a record year.

Labour could not possibly afford to invest £10 billion of taxpayers' money in renationalising the water companies without savagely cutting investment in water. It plans to renationalise the national grid for electricity and use it to control the whole generating and distribution industry. That would not merely depress spending on transmission, which is currently buoyant, but would choke off much of the huge private investment planned in conventional generating plant, orders for which amount to as much in capacity as the whole of our nuclear industry.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): If the Secretary of State is so keen on liberated water with all its virtues, why does he imagine that it has not happened in Scotland?

Mr. Lilley: Why does the hon. Gentleman not tell us where the Labour party would get the £10 billion needed to renationalise water in England and Wales? How would Labour maintain the investment programme if it did that?

Labour's policies would certainly prolong and deepen the recession. It is a mistake to assume that recoveries come about only in response to artificial fiscal stimuli. The recoveries in 1981 and 1975 did not. The retrenchment that causes a recession eventually brings about conditions that make recovery possible. Destocking runs its course and orders resume; increased saving is used to pay off debts; balance sheets are strengthened; savings flow back into capital markets; and stock markets then rise, as has happened recently, cutting the cost of capital. Companies improve their competitiveness in world markets and, as output grows again, it generates the income that provides increased demand. However, that will happen only as confidence is restored, and confidence at home depends crucially on continued success in the battle against inflation. We are winning that battle.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one reason why industry is hesitating about investment is because it has seen the opinion polls and the fact that there is a prospect of Labour forming a British Government? Industry knows that Labour Members have absolutely no experience of business, and industry in my constituency is horrified at the prospect of them gaining power. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, so in touch are Labour Members with manufacturing industry, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) came to launch Labour's "Made in Britain" campaign in the West Midlands by going to an excellent company in Cannock that distributes American capital equipment.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Confidence depends on another Conservative election victory, which is why markets rise when we are ahead in the polls and fall when our support flags.

Despite what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East says, the recession is not exclusive to this country. It has happened in many other countries, including America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Finland and Sweden, and it is spreading elsewhere. Confidence in the world economy is crucial.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: I shall give way in a moment.

That is why the Government attach so much importance to a speedy and successful conclusion to the GATT Uruguay round. Success will boost confidence and stimulate trade. Failure would destroy confidence and revive protectionism. In the 1930s, protectionism turned a severe recession into a prolonged slump. Labour Front-Bench Members never mention that issue, and the reasons are clear—they do not understand its importance and they have always been hostile to free trade.

Mr. Bell: The Secretary of State gave a list of countries experiencing recession, but he did not mention Japan. Is Japan experiencing a recession or not?

Mr. Lilley: The Japanese message delivered at Davos, along with that of many other countries, showed that it is clearly experiencing a very marked slowdown in its economy. If any Labour Member pretends that recession is not affecting other economies in the world, he is living in a dream world.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): May I pursue that point a little further? The other day, the Prime Minister specifically said that Japan was in recession. Does not the Secretary of State agree with the Prime Minister?

Mr. Lilley: I shall say quite clearly that that economy, like many others, is slowing down and experiencing the effects of a world recession.

It is always difficult to be sure, until several months after the event, when a recession has given way to recovery. The question is not which precise month the recovery did or will begin but how we can ensure that growth is sustainable, soundly based and enduring. We are set to ensure that. The outlook for this decade is even better than for the 1980s. It remains tough for many businesses, and no one is more aware of that than I am, as I am in constant contact with businesses from every sector and every region of the economy.

I know that demand remains weak, but industry is fundamentally strong—much stronger than it was a decade ago, when we were emerging from the last world recession—because of the profound changes that we introduced during the 1980s. We have improved industrial relations, restored incentives, removed burdens and released enterprise. As a result, we have started to reverse a century of relative decline. The 1980s were the first decade in peacetime, for more than a century, when our economy grew faster than that of France or Germany.

The changes have been greatest in our weakest areas. For example, manufacturing productivity grew faster than not only our main European competitors but any other major industrial country, including Japan. Our industrial relations have been transformed, from among the worst in the world to among the best in living memory.

The competitiveness of our industry is demonstrated by its success in world markets. During the past 10 years, the volume of our exports of manufactured goods has risen more rapidly than those of France, Germany, the United States and even Japan. The ultimate credit for those achievements goes to the business men and women and those they employ. Our policies merely open the opportunities, restore incentives and remove obstacles. The businesses have seized the opportunities, responded to the incentives, created the wealth and won the markets.

Why cannot the Labour party ever bring itself to acknowledge the achievements of British industry? Can any Labour spokesman show me a single speech that he has made paying tribute, not to the Government, but to British industry and the successes that it has chalked up in recent years?

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Is it not surprising that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) spoke for more than 40 minutes on a subject chosen by the Opposition but did not say one word of how Labour party policy would improve this country's industrial performance?

Mr. Lilley: It is extraordinary, but characteristic. We rarely hear anything much from the Labour party about its own policies.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not characteristic that the Secretary of State has allowed Government interventions, not Opposition ones?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for me, but for debate.

Mr. Lilley: It is extraordinary that Opposition Members do not intervene even when given the opportunity to disassociate themselves from policies if they wish to do so.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the enormous success of the British invention—the transputer—a computer on a chip, which has been marvellously successful throughout the world? How does he react to this afternoon's announcement that the factory that produces it in Britain is to close and the jobs go overseas because the Government have failed to invest in the company? The Government abandoned that British company—the investment of British taxpayers—and sold it at a knockdown price. The computer will continue to be manufactured and be hugely successful, but it will be manufactured in France, Italy and the United States of America—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Lilley: I do not respond with the relish shown by Opposition Members. I shall talk on the precise subject of the encouragement of innovation, and research and development in a few minutes—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about the answer?"] I shall first deal with a recent Opposition broadcast—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] What I have to say is relevant.

The Labour party's most recent party political broadcast constituted——

Several Hon. Members: Answer the question.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Give the Minister the opportunity to answer the question.

Mr. Lilley: It was no surprise that none of the Labour spokesman on industry were considered fit to present the broadcast, as we know that not one of them has any experience of industry, let alone manufacturing industry. But what was strange was the choice of David Puttnam as presenter. I like his films, but he represents service industry, not manufacturing, and is best known as one of the country's rejected exports. He left this country for Hollywood amid great fanfares, declaring that it was too small for his talents——

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Will the Minister reflect on what he has just said about the British film industry? He said that it was a service industry, not a manufacturing industry. Is that why we have lost so much in terms of our balance of payments under this Government and why the film industry has been hit so hard by the recession?

Mr. Lilley: Having told us how wonderful it would be in America, David Puttnam came back here, and in the broadcast he asserted that a range of equipment in a typical British home—from televisions to personal computers—was mainly made abroad. That is simply not true. Britain exports many more television sets than it imports. The Leader of the Opposition should know that, because there are three television factories in south Wales, not far from his constituency.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I shall bring the Secretary of State back to the subject that he evaded earlier. There was a transputer factory in south Wales that employed my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). That factory is now closing down. The company, Inmos, was established under a Labour Government and sold by the Conservative Government to EMI, which sold it to the Thomson company, which is nationalised. Does the right hon. Gentleman derive any joy from the fact that a British innovation—developed here, financed by taxpayers' money and turned into a profitable success—will now be produced entirely in France? Will he give us an honest answer?

Mr. Lilley: I do not derive any joy from that, but I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the Government should invest taxpayers' money in the company. If, God forbid, the right hon. Gentleman were ever to become Prime Minister, would he invest taxpayers' money in it?

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Gentleman knows very well that the reason Thomson took the company into France was that it operates within an infrastructure of enterprise that we shall establish here. That is why, even in the circumstances that the right hon. Gentleman describes as a world recession, France is still more successful, in every respect, than Britain under this Government.

Mr. Lilley: That is a frank admission that the Labour party will reconstitute the National Enterprise Board. I shall remind the right hon. Gentleman of its history. It invested in 102 companies, 35 of which went to the receiver or went bankrupt. Some 27 of those companies were sold at a loss, and only 30 of them returned the taxpayers' money. That is the industrial record of the policy to which the right hon. Gentleman wishes to return.

However, I am not surprised that the right hon. Gentleman wants to turn attention away from the embarrassing party political broadcast that the he entitled "Made in Britain", while denigrating the achievements of British industry. The broadcast pretended that nothing in the kitchen was made in the United Kingdom, but 85 per cent. of kitchen units are made in this country. It pretended that all hi-fis were made abroad, but *What Hi-Fi?* magazine puts British manufacturers top for quality turntables, CD players and speakers, and states that the single best hi-fi product is a British-made amplifier. That industry can do without denigration from the Labour party.

Mr. Puttnam was equally wrong about personal computers. Britain not merely invented them, but leads Europe in producing them. Nearly one in 10 personal computers sold in the world is made in Scotland. The Confederation of British Industry recently hailed the "transformation in Britain's manufacturing base" during the 1980s. Its report, "Competing with the World's Best" showed that Britain's importation of manufactured goods as a proportion of gross domestic product was almost identical to that of Germany—so much for the message that the Labour party was trying to convey.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): My right hon. Friend suggested that there was no connection between David Puttnam and a Labour Member in terms of the party political broadcast, but there is a tenuous but realistic link. David Puttnam produced an excellent film, "Chariots of Fire"; chariots have wheels. The message of the Labour party's political broadcast was that we should all buy British. It was no wonder that Opposition Members could not present a buy-British policy, as Labour Members buy chariots in the form of French cars.

Mr. Lilley: That is absolutely true. To mark the very day of Labour's "Made in Britain" campaign, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) invested in a Citroen.

The Government's priority is to strengthen further our industrial base, particularly by encouraging innovation. Economies grow not by doing the same old thing in the same old way but by constant innovation—not necessarily by quantum leaps and new inventions but by constant improvement of the products and processes in incremental steps.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): What computers does the right hon. Gentleman's Department use?

Mr. Lilley: A whole range, including a large number of British computers. I have recently met one of the largest manufacturers of small computers and endeavoured to see that he had the maximum possible access not just to my Department but to the whole Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency network——

Mr. Howarth: So the Department uses foreign ones too?

Mr. Lilley: British and foreign, of course. But we do not pretend that the British ones are foreign.

We need to accelerate the pace of innovation as each decade follows the previous one. Labour's approach to this problem, in so far as it has one, is far from innovative. It is a knee-jerk call for more Government spending on research and development, for more complex tax fiddles and for more state-run quangos. Those are precisely what we do not need.

Already, a higher proportion of research and development in this country is financed by the state than it is in most of our competitors' countries—far more than in Japan, for instance. Tax fiddles do not work; they distort decisions, and their costs are often twice their benefit. Quangos without commercial motivation are likely to impede rather than ameliorate successful innovation. The fact is that the Government spend a higher proportion of our GDP on civil research and development than the Japanese Government. Our research is often immensely successful academically. We win more Nobel prizes than any other country except the United States of America—more than Germany, three times as many as France and 14 times as many as Japan.

There is, however, all too little spin-off into commercial development and industrial activity. The answer is not more public spending but to break down the barriers that impede commercial exploitation and the development of our intellectual capacity in the academic science base, to bring industry and the science base closer together.

There are two kinds of barriers: institutional and cultural. We have already done much to reduce the institutional barriers and to remove the internal obstacles. As a result, contract research at unversities has much more than doubled since 1984, and collaborative research under our Link programme is growing fast. Already, about £350 million has been committed to it.

In many ways, the cultural barriers are more deep-rooted and are harder to remove. They pervade academic, business and social attitudes. Cultural attitudes cannot be changed by legal fiat. They can be changed and encouraged only by a series of small steps, individually insignificant but cumulatively effective. That is why the Government have established an innovation unit in my Department, manned not just by officials but by secondees from business, people of the highest calibre with successful experience innovation in industry.

We believe in taking advice from industry, not in telling business what to do. The unit's remit is to analyse, formulate and help to implement changes that will remove institutional and cultural barriers to innovation in business and the science base.

One cultural barrier in this country is the low esteem that used to be accorded to engineering. It is vital that we recognise the crucial importance, demanding intellectual nature and economic relevance of the engineering profession. I welcome the steps being taken by the professional bodies to unite. That will give the profession a more powerful voice.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): I have been listening to the right hon. Gentleman's words of wisdom about engineering. This weekend I shall be going to GEC, where I will relate the words of the Minister to cheer up the workers who, however, will be on a picket line because 142 of them are being sacked. The inner-city area of Manchester has lost 20,000 jobs. What will the right hon. Gentleman do about that? Will he intervene and invite Mr. Weinstock to a meeting to talk to the workers and keep GEC going?

Mr. Lilley: One does not succeed in business by propping up and artificially sustaining given manning levels, however tragic it may be—and I agree that it is—when jobs are lost. If we are to have long-term solutions rather than short-term responses, one of the key actions to take is that of enhancing the prestige of the engineering profession. That is why I attach such importance to it.

I was pleased to give Government support to the premier engineering award recently—the McRobert award—to enhance the profession's prestige and standing. Today the first national innovation lecture is being given before a distinguished audience at the Royal Society, jointly sponsored by us, the Royal Society and the engineering bodies. I am delighted to add that the lecture is being given by Akio Morita, the founder of Sony and one of the outstandingly successful innovators in the world. He is also a good friend of this country.

Finally, I welcome the CBI's recent excellent report on manufacturing, "Competing with the World's Best", which sets the objective of attracting more of the brightest and best young people into careers in engineering and manufacturing. The CBI rightly emphasises the renaissance of manufacturing which began in the 1980s, and it condemns those who deny that fact and the achievements of our industry.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that Rolls-Royce is synonymous with quality. Indeed, it is the only remaining wholly British-owned company in the car business. Would he like to send a message to my constituents who have experienced a 47 per cent. increase in unemployment, including their utterly brutal ejection from their jobs by Rolls-Royce?

Mr. Lilley: My Department has recently taken up on behalf of Rolls-Royce cars some of the problems in the American market that severely affect it. I presume that the hon. Lady does not share the belief of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that there is no severe recession in the United states: there is, and the problem has been aggravated by the tax on luxury cars there. We are doing all in our power to have that tax withdrawn so as to help the company and the hon. Lady's constituents.

Earlier today, the Labour party issued an eight-page press release about the recession, including not a word about Labour's policies. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East made only the most cursory reference to his party's policy. Why does Labour shrink from spelling out the details of its policies? The answer is that it has been intellectually paralysed by the collapse of socialism throughout the world, on which its whole political thinking used to be based.

This is not just my view; it is the view of Robert Harris, a Labour sympathiser, and he reached it in an article which merits reading out:

> "The truth is that Labour . . . is perilously close to brain dead . . . Where is the brainpower to galvanize the country and return a Labour Government? Sometimes in the right light Labour looks more impressive than it has for a generation: disciplined, talented, responsible, well-presented"—

and lovely suits, one might add—

> "then you stand still for a moment and listen and you can hear . . . nothing. It is eerie. It is like walking down a street built on a film set: the technicians have put up wonderful frontages, but behind them—thin air."

He concludes:

> "It is often said that previous Labour Government were blown off course. But at least they had a course to be blown off."

That is why Labour Front-Bench spokesmen fall apart under questioning—they lack any underlying intellectual coherence. They have given their policies no sustained thought. They have had 13 years in opposition to rewrite their lines and to rehearse them, but they have been, for them, 13 wasted years.

All this shows up in the drama over the Opposition's policy for the recession. In act I, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) announces a £1 billion cure for the recession. In act II, his right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook is asked how it will be financed and replies that it will have to wait for the economy to grow and generate some spare money. What a bizarre cure; it can only be administered when the patient is on the mend. It amounts to giving the economic body a blood transfusion only when it is strong enough to be a blood donor.

In act III, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East disowns his right hon. Friend the

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Member for Sparkbrook and says that the package would start straight away. He thus destroys Beckett's law, whereby Labour has only two pledges for immediate implementation. The right hon. Lady the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) wisely remains silent.

The final act came this morning, when the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East revealed that not a penny of the proposed tax cuts in the emergency package for industry would reach industry before October 1993. We are back to deferred blood transfusions.

Labour's emergency package amounts to a few hundred million pounds down on employment measures, plus a temporary tax cut on account. It is simply not credible that the growth of the gross domestic product of this country, which is worth £600 billion, can be entirely dependent on Government spending of one thousandth of that amount, more or less.

In the absence of policies, what have the Opposition got in the way of people? If not measures, let us look at the men.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East aspires to be Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. There is no harm in that; many people want the job, and most people do hold it from time to time. But I wonder how the hon. Member's job application would look. I suppose that it would read something like this: name, Brown, James Gordon; age 40½; business experience, none so far; good degree in history; student rector of Edinburgh university 1972-75; temporary lecturer 1976; only job in the private sector, TV producer; believes this experience would fit him to run British industry, pick winners, select strategic investment, invest taxpayers' money, set up a state bank and take over water, electricity and eventually the other utilities.

Mr. Dewar *rose*——

Mr. Lilley: After today, I do not think that he would get an interview.

Mr. Dewar: I just want to suggest to the Secretary of State that the trouble with this bit of character assassination is that the hon. Members to whom he is talking have just heard my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East's speech, and they have heard his.

Mr. Lilley: They have heard from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East not a word of policy, not a positive proposal for British industry, no recognition of the importance of innovation, sneering at free trade, despising competition. They have heard his right hon. Friend the leader of the Opposition saying that we are going back to the National Enterprise Board, to intervention, to policies which failed in the 1960s and were a dismal disaster in the 1970s.

It is clear that Labour's policies would make recession worse and delay recovery. They would hit industry at every level. Their minimum wage would destroy job opportunities for the most vulnerable. Their national insurance increases would hit vital middle management. Their top-rate increase would cripple enterprise and those who create new jobs and businesses.

Our policies have laid the conditions for sustained viable recovery. That depends above all on confidence at home and a stable world trading environment abroad. Only a Conservative Government can secure that at home and pursue that abroad.

I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to reject the Opposition's destructive motion.

6.13 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): During the speeches of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and of the Secretary of State, my mind, I am afraid, drifted away from time to time to thinking about the difference between Dennis the Menace's dog Gnasher and Lord Snooty and his pals. It strikes me that there is only one difference between those two caricatures: Gnasher uses maximum energy to minimum effect; Lord Snooty uses minimum energy to minimum effect. What we have heard in the last one and half hours or so has sounded very much like that.

We come to the House to listen to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East with keen anticipation, for he is a very fine debater. Indeed, had he joined my profession, the law, I am sure that he would have made an enormous success of it, whether in Scotland or in England and Wales. However, in his speech today he did not do much more than set the great conundrum of our time, as he would have it: is there or is there not a recession? It was as if the future of British industry and the British economy depended upon the answer to that conundrum. I thought that he would come up towards the end of his speech, like a great panjandrum, with the answer to the great conundrum. He talked about the Conservative messenger who did not believe the message. Yet he sounded a bit like the Labour messenger who had forgotten to carry the message with him.

We heard from the hon. Gentleman a litany of entirely merited criticism of the Government's policies without any positive indication of what a Labour Government would do which I think that this House and the country are entitled to hear in a major debate, in Opposition time, the debate being of Labour's choosing, on our economy and industry.

I am not sure if it matters a jot whether we label what is happening a recession. Whatever it is, it is happening; whatever it is, we know the symptoms; and whatever it is, we, as members of political parties in the House, owe the country the duty of telling it what we regard as beiing the cure, without the snarling and snapping that is giving the House a bad name.

Something else occurred to me during the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. He appeared to claim that there are those in industry and business who want a Labour Government, because they believe that a Labour Government could manage the economy, make the economy stronger and provide the base for manufacturing industry to grow. Yet he did not tell us who those people in industry are. He did not tell us which industrial organisations or chambers of trade—it is certainly not the Confederation of British Industry—want a Labour Government. He did not begin to address the important credibility gap, not just at home but abroad, by saying what would justify industry and business in supporting a Labour Government.

Internal confidence needs external confidence. The Labour party has failed quite wretchedly to find any external support in the financial institutions or economists of the world to encourage internal confidence if we had a Labour Government.

Labour is right in saying that the French have done better. The Government are wrong to say that we are merely victims of a world recession. The French evidence mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition was good enough to show that. The German economy is still growing at a rate of 3·2 per cent. That is a remarkable success story, particularly when one considers the problems that Germany has had with unification. It is not in recession, at least to anything like the extent of the United Kingdom. It has managed to enjoy positive economic growth, while our GDP fell by 2·5 per cent. during 1991.

The Treasury took a long time to recognise that Britain had suffered the biggest one-year drop since the great depression of the 1930s. The autumn statement projection of 2·25 per cent. growth for 1992 has been utterly discredited, and plainly was influenced by the prospect of a November election that never happened. It is likely that the fourth quarter figures due later this month will show that the economy was flat.

The cumulative cost in terms of lost output has hit £100 billion—an average of £5,000 for every British family. The Government claim to be able to call on external confidence, but they fail to do anything to fuel the internal confidence that would justify a more optimistic view of the British economy for the future.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): The hon. and learned Gentleman makes much of forecasts that he claims were arranged in line with the timing of a possible general election. I remind him of the words of the Liberal Democrat pocket guide to Conservative party policy, published in 1991, which stated, to its credit:

> "The Conservatives in 1979 recognised the need for change after three decades of stultifying corporatism."

If that was not a forecast of better economic prospects, what was? What would be the effect on the rural economy and on national inflation of the 50p increase in petrol prices that the Social Democrat leader advocated earlier this week?

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Gentleman is a little off the point, and he is very selective in his reading. His first quotation related directly to trade union law reforms that he knows perfectly well were supported by my party. His second point was also selective. If he will read all our policy, he will find clearly stated our determination to ensure that rural areas are protected against the petrol price rises that the Conservatives, Labour, and my own party recognise are otherwise inevitable in due course to protect the environment. The Tory party has not said that it would ensure that rural areas do not suffer disproportionately as a result. The hon. Gentleman has made an entirely peripheral intervention. I will return to the subject of the debate.

Part of the Government's failure can be seen every week in our constituency surgeries, at which small business people complain about the way in which their firms failed. Often, that happened not because they were poor managers but because they were unable to collect debts owed by other businesses that went broke. This serious problem led to the record 47,000 business failures that occurred in 1991.

Although prominence has been given to south-east England being especially badly affected by recent economic trends, Dun and Bradstreet surveys show that, in terms of percentage increases in insolvencies, Scotland and Wales were hardest hit, with increases of 77 per cent. and 74 per cent. respectively. It is not a south-east phenomenon, but has hit us all—including the rural areas where business expansion plays such an important role.

The Government's forecasts have already been caricatured by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, and they were bizarre. Every season in 1991 the Government presented another inaccurate forecast. In the spring, we were promised that the recession would be "short-lived and shallow", and that growth would begin again towards the middle of the year. In the summer, we were told that Britain was coming out of the recession. In the autumn, we were informed that

> "the green shoots of economic spring are appearing once again."

In the winter, the Government were driven to the desperation of calling upon alchemy—

> "what Disraeli once called the alchemy of time."

The problems of manufacturing industry will be solved not by alchemy but by sound economic policies. That means managing the economy—not the use of alchemic tubes to produce some mythical solution.

Industry has identified its own problems very clearly. The best economic predictions have come from the Confederation of British Industry, and particularly from its chief economist, Andrew Sentance. The CBI's latest quarterly industrial trends survey shows that confidence is virtually non-existent, and that new orders are expected to continue falling. Export orders declined significantly for a sixth successive quarter. Output showed a negative balance of 29 per cent., and, after a slight improvement in October, 34 per cent. of business men were less optimistic about their companies' prospects.

I ask on behalf of my party, and of small business people in particular: why do the Government not take the steps that could be taken in an enterprise economy, without nationalisation and corporatism, to revive our service and manufacturing industries? I urge the Secretary of State to say why, when business person after business person tells him, "Of course, we must have a single European currency," he continues to insist on the opt-out that is so unrealistic and damaging to British industry? Is there one senior figure in British industry and commerce who really believes that we are not bound to have a single currency in the end? Why not accept that, and play a leading role in creating it in as beneficial an environment as possible?

Why does not the Secretary of State accept the example of the German economy? Even allowing for different national characteristics, which are not unimportant, their experience is something that we could usefully follow. German interest rates have been taken out of the hands of politicians. They still exercise some influence, but they do not make the decisions. The independence of the German central bank, which is not immune to political influence, provides a guarantee of confidence in the German economy.

Why did the Government choose, when the time was right, to ignore the good sense of going into the narrow bands of the exchange rate mechanism?

Why will the Government not agree to reforming corporation tax, to guarantee its neutrality against

[Mr. Carlile]

inflation, and to index it to provide more certain benefits to business than capital allowances—which would ensure that business inflationary gains would not be taxed?

Why have the Government been so half-hearted about infrastructure projects? An obvious example is the channel tunnel. If one goes to Calais, one will see a few miles away the motorways to the channel tunnel that have already been constructed, and the train grand vitesse that is waiting to whisk travellers all over France—once they have managed to struggle to the tunnel. Why are the British Government not prepared to follow the example set by the Franch and to make it clear that the whole of Britain should benefit from the channel tunnel?

Why is it that areas where industry is growing, such as the rural areas in my constituency, not only remain deprived of road infrastructure but are subjected to the destruction of the rail infrastructure by a British Railways Board intent on setting itself up for privatisation rather than providing the services that the public need?

Why will the Government not refocus training and enterprise councils when it is clear that, although they are doing a good job in a limited area, TECs could achieve so much more if they could refocus on retraining people who are already in work rather than concentrating virtually all their resources on training those who are out of work? Both jobs need to be done. The TECs are failing to carry out the necessary retraining because they have not the resources to do so.

Why do not the Government help the small businesses that face liquidation and bankruptcy by legislating for late payment of debt to be subject to statutory interest after 30 days?

Why will they not reduce the administrative burdens on small firms by indexing employees' national insurance contributions and income tax, coupled with employee end-of-year self-assessment of tax? Why have they not provided a seedcorn capital investment programme to fund the administration costs of new projects? Such projects could be supported by regional private venture capital funds.

We did not hear the Labour party mention any of those possible measures; nor did we hear the Government tell us what they would do to drag business out of the recession that has affected it so badly. I find no difficulty in telling the House that those measures can be taken, and that the people are entitled to be told what those measures are.

Ours remains a great trading nation, it remains a manufacturing nation, and it remains one of the great financial and legal centres of the world. All those sectors of our economy, however, have suffered under recent Government policy.

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): All this is very fine, but may I ask a question about infrastructure? What would the hon. and learned Gentleman say to the many Liberals throughout the country who—as he knows full well—opposed the expansion of the M65, especially in north-east Lancashire?

Mr. Carlile: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have a connection with that area. On occasion, I have made the railway journey from London to Burnley. It is fine until Preston; it then becomes picturesque—I think that that is the most complimentary description that can be applied. Our policy is to put as many passengers and as much freight as possible on to a decent railway system, as opposed to a system that is constantly being dismantled by British Rail.

We will not revive the British economy by means of state intervention; nor will we revive it by nationalising either our own industries or those in other countries on which we spend money; nor will we revive it by taking our hands off and not intervening in any way. There are many precedents for a well-run but not over-managed enterprise economy—an economy stimulated by fiscal measures in particular, which would generate confidence within business, and external confidence in the United Kingdom.

I have offered the House just a few of those measures. There are many more, and it is a pity that we have not heard about any of them this evening from other parties.

6.33 pm

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): I declare an interest: I was in industry for 20 years, and I have been in Parliament for 20 years. As I listened to the remarkable, fiery speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), an amazing thought came to me. I was reminded of a phrase that is often heard in industry: he passed through at supersonic speed, generating much heat but no light.

I presume that the hon. Gentleman has now gone out to take a shower and cool off. I am sorry that he has left us, because I feel that he should be here to learn what it is like to be in industry, and what it is like to know how to deal, when fighting in foreign markets, with the effect that his speech will have on our exporters. I am sorry that Mr. Morita was not present to listen to the hon. Gentleman, for I hope to be with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State listening to Mr. Morita. I think that Mr. Morita would be extremely worried, given his possible plans for investment in this country, not to have heard Labour's plans for the taxation of industry and its encouragement if it ever achieves power. I hope that we shall hear the answer from the Opposition Member who winds up the debate.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Warren: Well, seeing it's you.

Mr. Williams: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I was in charge of inward investment under a Labour Government. I negotiated with Mr. Morita in Japan, and met him in this country. He knows that we are very supportive, and, indeed, that we initiated much of the Japanese investment that has taken place.

Mr. Warren: I am not so sure how successful the right hon. Gentleman really was. I know that he meant well, but I remember that he started the Inmos programme and completely failed to invest the amount that was necessary. He made it possible for the company to set up its headquarters in the United States. That seemed to have been forgotten when the Leader of the Opposition intervened earlier.

Let us consider how industry will have received the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. I have some questions to pose on the basis of my industrial knowledge, which I hope may help hon. Members on both sides of the House. There is no doubt that, over the past few yeaers, the country has achieved a remarkable reduction in inflation and a remarkable improvement in the level of exports. As an ex-trade union official, I also welcome the improvement in industrial relations across the country.

We have a great basis for the revival of British industry, but that revival will require a combined effort—the kind of team work that has not been affected in government for 20 or 30 years. We may not have understood as well as we should that, when we face great competitors like Mr. Morita and his colleagues—and our competitors in West Germany—we should examine the way in which they compete with us. Those countries show a unique dedication, in industry and financial services and in their Governments, to trying to act as a team. I should like to see much more of that here. I should like to take industry out of the cauldron of dissension in which it is so often placed when it is debated in the House.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) mentioned the problem of small businesses, and the difference between what they need and what is done to them by the financial services organisations. I am sure that every hon. Member has repeatedly been approached by the small business men who come to tell us that the banks are threatening to put them out of business. We know that, in fact, the banks are trying to recoup their top management errors—failed ventures in the second and third worlds.

When it is suggested to a local bank manager that it may be better to try to keep a little business going than to lose even more money by making it bankrupt, it seems that such matters can no longer be decided at local branch level. All the local knowledge of bank managers is no longer used. Only today, I heard of a major bank that apparently requires a second manager to vet all loans—a manager who has no knowledge of the small businesses to whom such loans might be made.

The banks in particular need to look at their investment policies. They need to see themselves as essential collaborators with industry. I hope that the Government, as the country's largest single customer, will examine the way in which it can play a part in reviving British industry and its opportunities. The fundamental problem is that we are not competing in world markets as well as we could be.

In terms of the manufacturing share that we have captured, we are better off per capita than those who export from the United States or Japan. Ahead of us, however, lies not only the problem of the unity of those countries in endeavouring to hold on to the markets and deny them to us, but the way in which the Japanese themselves are surging forward.

Before I say more about that, let me deal with the return on investment in this country, and the need for the Government to address the problems—which are long-standing and have spread over many periods of office —to establish whether, as the Budget draws near, some solution might be found.

Between 1976 and 1990—I say this to please the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams)—the return on investment in manufacturing industry has been 8 per cent. In West Germany, it has been 16 per cent. and in Japan 22 per cent. With the return on investment being so small, it is no surprise that people do not want to invest in manufacturing industry. If one has some money to save, it seems sensible to place it where it will gain the best return. So we end up with the problems with which we are familiar. Over the same period, in the United Kingdom, £2,000 per man was invested in industry. In West Germany, it was nearly £3,000 per man, and in Japan it was over £5,000. It is a better bet. The team spirit across the economy encourages people to invest in industry in those countries and helps them to hold on to world markets.

We must not despair, as we so often do, about the ability of British industry to rise when it is given the opportunity. The Japanese have invested in Britain and brought the team spirit here. One has only to look at the performance of Mr. Morita's Sony and the Nissan company in Sunderland to see that British workers, given the opportunity, out-perform the parent companies in Japan. It is splendid to know that Japanese televisions from south Wales and motor cars from the north-east are being exported back to Japan. If we can get our act together, we can beat them all. That is not just rhetoric. We know from experience in our constituencies and our opportunities to visit factories that there is the willingness, determination and ability to conquer.

That is a base—I am again referring to the Budget—from which more should be done. From my industrial experience, I believe that we are doing all that from too narrow an educational base. In West Germany and Japan, twice as many young people complete studies up to A-level. If one is to do a good job in engineering, one needs to be equipped not just with the tools of the trade but with the intellectual breadth of learning that can enable one to use those tools most effectively. I should like to see the Government look at ways of raising the quality of education and keeping more people in our education system up to A-level.

I should like to remind the Government, whom I loyally support, that there is a need to look at research establishments, whether they are Government sponsored or in private industry. We are funding far too few alpha-rated research projects. Only about 30 per cent. or 40 per cent. of the projects put forward are receiving funding. Those projects are the seedcorn for five, 10 or 15 years' time. In domestic electronics, it is a couple of years before patents are out in the marketplace, and in the pharmaceutical industry it can be 10 to 15 years. Greater attention needs to be paid to sowing the seedcorn to ensure that it grows.

In the forthcoming Budget, we could also look at training. British industry is achieving great things, but technicians and craftsmen attend, on average, one course in 14 years of employment. Think what we could do if we had the same level of training as West Germany or France. Overall, employees in industry attend one course in 33 years or one course in a 45-year period in industry. That is not good enough. However, the Government alone should not be responsible for that. The captains of industry should look to the way in which they are running the training courses for their employees. They should not sit back and wait for Government action. If we are to meet the problems that we will face in the future, we need more investment in training.

The Japanese and the Germans—our major competitors—are waging a patent war against us, and major problems will arise. We turn in about 24,000 patents a year. The Germans turn in 31,000—a substantial increase on our figure—but the Japanese turned in 10 times that amount—309,000—in 1988, the last year for which figures are available. The Government should look to their agencies to try to produce data more up to date than those

[Mr. Warren]

over three years old. It is immensely difficult to do corporate planning, let alone produce political manifestos, if one has to rely on statistics that are so out of date.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): The hon. Gentleman is highly regarded on industry policy, and we always listen to him with care and interest. He talked about a poor return on investment—I think that he used the 8 per cent. figure. How does he advocate breaking in to the chicken-and-egg problem of getting investment going but not being able to do it when the return is so low? Does he support the Government's almost totally hands-off industrial policy, or does he feel that some greater level of intervention is necessary in order to achieve a better return and thereby higher rates of investment in industry?

Mr. Warren: With great respect, not because I am a Conservative, but because of my experience in industry, I would stick to our policy rather than that of the Opposition.

I have talked about planting the seedcorn and about training. The initiatives must come particularly from industry to make it more worth while to invest. The problems of industry will not be solved simply by throwing money at them. Throwing taxpayers' money at those problems is simply a waste of workers' wages. We must raise the quality of those working in industry so that they can be more competitive. That will attract investment. We must get away from the candy-floss opportunity for investment and show that it is far better to put money into production lines.

The Government should look seriously at the fact that they are the largest single customer in the country. The Government buy £4 billion-worth of goods and services each year in information technology. Half that is taken up by the defence industry. The Government buy 20 per cent. of all British output. That is not a form of interventionism. The Government are buying what they need. Surprisingly, government is the most labour-intensive business in the country, and it certainly needs more information technology.

The Government must look at the way in which such purchasing power affects the corporate strategy of British companies. People queue up to sell to Boeing and to Marks and Spencer. I should like to see them queuing up to sell to the Government, because they are a good customer. If we can get better buyers in government, we will get better value for money and lower taxation. That is the intervention of common sense.

Having listened to the stirring of muddy waters from the Opposition Front Bench, I must convey a feeling that I know runs throughout industry. Industrialists and workers do not have confidence in the Labour party, and I trust that it will not succeed in the vote tonight or in the election to come.

6.48 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): There is a place in my constituency called Strand road. Preston is an attractive town, but I cannot pretend that Strand road is an attractive place. However, it is an important place. It has been the heart of industry in my constituency. It has two large factories—British Aerospace, which is in the process of closing, and GEC, where the workers are worried about their prospects and the lack of orders for trains. If one goes around Preston, one will find closed factories, factories with greatly reduced work forces and factories with worried workers.

After 13 years, the Tory Government still keep talking about long-term solutions. I have a five-year-old grandson so I know exactly what five-year-olds are like. A five-year-old from 13 years ago is now an 18-year-old wondering about the prospects for the future. To that 18-year-old, those 13 years have offered ample opportunity for many a long-term solution, but all he or she faces is a long-term mess.

Manufacturing employment in the north-west has fallen by 37 per cent. since 1979; 322,000 jobs have been lost. Even according to the rather fraudulent means by which employment figures are now calculated, unemployment in the north-west is more than 152,000 higher. The Secretary of State says, "Be optimistic." I rather favour optimism, but if one is in a snow storm, optimism cannot keep one warm. I favour positive thinking, but, as a gardener, I know that it will not protect geraniums from the frost. Optimism is very nice and is very useful, but it does not guard against the harshest facts of climate or economic climate.

The Government's amendment does not mention unemployment, but it complains about the social charter and the national minimum wage. Presumably the Government think that workers must try to maintain their jobs by being willing to accept any wages and conditions. I do not think that that is what workers in my constituency want. They want useful, secure jobs that pay good wages and offer good conditions. A Government worth their salt should be prepared to say, "Yes, it is partly our responsibility to create the conditions in which that will happen."

Tory Members in my area seem to think that it is my fault that jobs at British Aerospace are under threat and that I am responsible for the Government's defence procurement policy. That is remarkable. I have a straightforward view on defence. It is essential to defend the country, which will cost money, but we should ensure that it costs as little as possible and that the primary purpose of defence expenditure is saving and creating jobs in our country. I also think that that makes defence sense. From an industrial, economic and defence point of view, British Aerospace workers rightly object strongly to the build up of non-UK arms industries.

Mr. Roger King: What is the hon. Lady talking about?

Mrs. Wise: I am talking about the fact that British Aerospace's management has told me that they are hindered by the Government's procurement policy, which consists of going into the marketplace as if they are buying butter and seeing what is cheapest, regardless of its effect on the company's capacity to plan ahead.

Mr. King: I was guilty of saying, "What is the hon. Lady talking about?", because I understand that Labour's policy is to slash defence expenditure and not to encourage overseas arms sales, to which British Aerospace is resolutely committed. It confidently expects to conclude a substantial arms deals in the Persian Gulf area shortly. Would an incoming Labour Government tear that up?

Mrs. Wise: I have tried to explain in words of one syllable that, despite the Government's policy of high arms expenditure, defence jobs have melted away like snow in summer. I have also tried to explain that I favour a rational policy of forward planning and of ensuring that defence expenditure keeps our workers in employment. I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman cannot follow that.

Mr. Lee: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: I have just given way to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King). That is quite enough.

I do not share the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Northfield for arms exports. I do not want workers in my constituency to depend on other people's wars and suffering for their jobs. That is not the way in which they would prefer to earn their living, given an opportunity for useful and peaceful production. A Labour Government will lead us towards useful and peaceful production. I shall do my share to encourage that.

An Opposition Front-Bench spokesman visited Preston today and spoke about the defence diversification agency, which I believe will be of much value to British Aerospace workers in my area. That constructive policy will build for the future and will not depend on other people's wars or on giving dictators and repressive regimes the means to keep their people down.

The contract for maintenance work on tornado aircraft has just been awarded to RAF St. Athan. I believe that taxpayers' money should be used most effectively. The skilled workers who built the Tornado, who know it through and through, are in my constituency. Seven hundred jobs are at stake. I do not understand the logic of investing £40 million to maintain the Tornado at St. Athan. The Royal Air Force personnel will inevitably be less efficient, because the trained workers are in Preston.

We fear that, because it may prove extremely difficult to find enough Royal Air Force staff at St. Athan, some of the workers from Preston will take the civilian jobs that may become available there and end up doing the same work but away from their families. That is not a logical way to go about things. The Ministry of Defence must invest in maintenance by using civilian workers who are already familiar with the aircraft they maintain.

Next door to the British Aerospace factory which is closing is GEC, which needs orders for trains. It is years since British Rail ordered any high-speed trains. I should like to give some international comparisons. InterCity uses class 91 (IC225) first generation trains. Class 93 (IC250), if produced, would be the second generation. Although InterCity has become the only profitable railway system in the world, it has been required to cut over £90 million from its 1991-92 budget to help ease the overall British Rail financial crisis. That is cloud cuckoo land.

While British Rail is compelled to slash its investment programme, the Swedes are now on their second successful generation of the X train, and Japan is on its third generation of the bullet. The French are on the third generation of the TGV and are exporting it in mass to Spain and America. The French Government have decided that the TGV Atlantique is of economic benefit to a depressed region and have provided additional investment finance.

Why has British Rail had to slash its investment? Because there is no coherent transport policy in this country. I am pleased that Labour is committed to a coherent transport policy which will consider at one and the same time transport needs and the industrial development brought about by supplying those transport needs, including export shop windows. That would also save employment and improve the environment.

All we have from the Government are quarrels among their Front Benchers about how to privatise British Rail, not about how to get investment or to keep trains running. They are quarrelling about the exact forms of the companies under privatisation, no doubt because they want whatever form of privatisation will give the best return to their friends. My constituents in GEC need Labour's transport policy. With that, there would be orders for trains. With orders for trains, the work force at GEC would have secure jobs.

Lest anyone thinks that that is just my gloss on matters, Labour's programme for transport says that there will be

"a substantial and sustained increase in investment in new transport infrastructure."

The position is the same with buses. We have seen the killing of a coherent public transport bus system. I get complaints from some people that too many buses run past their doors because they are on lucrative routes. I get complaints from others that there are no buses. If people live two miles outside a town, and have toddlers or are elderly, they might as well live on the moon.

Labour stands for the development of public transport, which needs buses. Good public transport needs new buses. Deregulation opened the way for a good secondhand market in buses, but it did nothing for Leyland Bus. Vigorous trade in clapped-out vehicles is no good for safety or for the environment, and it is deplorable for Leyland Bus in the Lancashire area. Labour will go a long way towards curing our transport ills.

Although I have concentrated on manufacturing, I must remind the House—I may be the only hon. Member to do so—that all that has a knock-on effect on retailing. It takes longer to get through, but it has got through now. In Preston, Lewis's has a fortnight's stay of execution. It is a perfectly good shop. Why did it go bust? The answer is that people cannot afford to buy. Employment in retail trade also depends on a healthy economy.

In not mentioning unemployment in their amendment, the Tories are guilty of a give-away. They have talked about high tax. That shows nerve, coming from the party which increased VAT from 8 to 17·5 per cent., with adverse affects on retailing and everyone apart from the best off. Not too many pensioners pay income tax, but all pensioners pay VAT. VAT is well known as a highly regressive tax.

When the Prime Minister tables an amendment which complains about high taxation, he should take the message to heart. We stand for fair taxation. Fair taxation would help to bring about a healthy economy, because ordinary people would have more money to spend in the shops. If we have a sensible policy on investment in manufacturing, people will be able to spend their money on goods made in Britain, thus keeping jobs. In that way, the British economy would cease to be a leaky bucket and would have recycling and increased creation of wealth. I look forward to that day.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I must remind the House that between now and 9 o'clock speeches will be limited to 10 minutes.

7.6 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): Is it not interesting that, whether we are talking about the level of teenage pregnancies, drug-taking, homelessness, the retention of hedgerows in the countryside, crime or the economy, the Labour party's reaction is as boringly predictable as Pavlov's dogs: everything is always solely the fault of the Conservative Government. Like Auntie Maggie's home-made remedy, which I should like to sing, that judgment applies to everything, without exception. But unlike Auntie Maggie's highly prized medicament, it is certainly not "guaranteed never to fail". It will fail because the electorate can see straight through it.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who opened the debate for the Opposition, has given a lulu of a hostage to fortune in that wonderful quote:

> "There is no world recession."

My word, that will come back to haunt him; it will probably rank in future with that famous phrase, "I see no ships." There are one or two other examples.

The voter knows well that every major trading nation is having trouble with its economy. The Labour party is unhappy that news should come out that there is a recession in places such as America, Australia and New Zealand. With injunctions being very much in the news, I fear that the Labour party may slap an injunction on any news about recession in any part of the world. I see no point in denying that Britain is in recession too, or that I worry about unemployment and am deeply concerned about the number of bankruptcies. But there is good news, too.

British industry is in a much better condition than it was 12 years ago. Inflation is below the EC average, corporation tax is the lowest in the industrialised world and, in spite of some of the things that have been said, we attract far more inward investment than our competitors. I am thinking especially of France and Germany.

I was interested to read in the *Financial Times* that, of the top 500 companies in Europe, 181 are British, 63 are French and 63 are German. *The Economist* and *Director* magazine commented that, of the top 400 European industrial companies, 120 are British, 75 French and 71 German. So we are not doing badly in comparison to our neighbours across the channel. We are sound and competitive and we are no longer the sick man of Europe, although I remember when we were.

I shall suggest one or two ways in which the Government could help businesses in trouble. As the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said —he has now left the Chamber—one of the major problems faced by small and medium sized businesses is bad debt. I agree with him about that, but I was interested to hear that his party is apparently committed to doling out lots of taxpayers' money to help any firm that happens to be in difficulty. That way disaster lies, but bad debt is another question.

In Birmingham we are proud of our spanking new convention centre. It incorporates the finest concert hall in the world, a theatre and every possible adjunct for every possible conference on any subject. Many firms were engaged in building it and did a fine job. The scheme cost about £160 million and we understood at the time that it would create 2,000 new jobs directly and 10,000 support jobs before very long. That was good news, but more than 100 companies which helped to build the centre have not been paid. Some have been forced into bankruptcy because of that non-payment, not because the major firm has gone out of business.

A constituent came to see me in desperation only last Friday. He was on the verge of calling in the receivers. If he does so, that will mean the loss of 50 more jobs in my area. I have not yet been able to find out exactly why that is happening. Perhaps the city council has not handed over the money or perhaps there is a dispute about the final bill, but what matters to me is that good, honest, hard-working small business men are being made bankrupt not because they are inefficient or because of bad workmanship but because money owed to them is not being paid

Some time ago we debated the possibility of the enforcement of the payment of interest on outstanding bills. The Federation of Small Businesses is not in faovur of that, although there is an argument for it. The federation calls for a reform of the small claims court and wants any judgment for payment outstanding after 28 days automatically to trigger an enforcement hearing. That might be the answer, but I want my right hon. and hon. Friends to consider the terrible problem of bad debts.

Mr. Flynn: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: No, I am short of time.

In the west midlands, nothing is more important than the motor industry. Tens of thousands of small businesses provide components for cars and the west midlands stands or falls by the success of the car industry. Nothing would help us more than the removal of the 10 per cent. surcharge on new car sales, which I believe to be a tax on a tax. The industry badly needs such a shot in the arm.

I do not like businesses being unpaid tax collectors, but that has been happening for some time. However, I hope that it will not be extended. I do not like the requirement to make deductions from employees who do not pay the community charge, and there are one or two further issues that I would mention if I had the time.

There is a problem with a European Community law on contaminated land. It is very important in my area and, in others that derelict land is reclaimed and revitalised and that all its possibilities are exploited. In the west midlands there is a very important firm called Richardson Developments. It bought about 10 or 12 years ago an ex-Ministry ordnance works which manufactured Royal Navy guns and gunnery equipment. There were 20 units on the site which were in reasonable condition and 20 more have been built, so it is now a reasonable size of about 40 small industrial units.

The site borders Coventry canal and one day a tenant washed a machine and caused slurry to go into the canal. Richardson Development, not the tenant, was yanked into court, which was a terrible thing to happen to such a firm. Nothing happened to the firm because the judge threw out the case. Richardson was given a conditional discharge for two years and there was no financial penalty but it was a waste of time and money. I am concerned that banks are now issuing warnings about the draft EC directive which say that firms could be liable for the clean-up costs of their industrial customers. It is a complicated matter but one which I hope my hon. Friends will consider.

We shall not take any lessons from the Labour party about how to handle the economy. Labour's policies would ruin it and we would lose all that we have gained. We should once again be in thrall to militancy and the unions. The harm done by militant trade unions to the car industry in the 1970s was incalculable. It all but ruined that industry.

I am worried now that the Labour party say that it will end capping. Birmingham city council is spending the most amazing sums on the most extraordinary projects and I hope that the burden of these crazy ideas will not be put on industry because that would be just one more death knell.

7.16 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): In the 10 minutes available to me I shall touch on a subject which is virtually taboo, especially in the run-up to an election. What I have to say is inevitably anathema to both Front Benches, although I understand why that should be so. However, it is an issue about which hon. Members from all parties are concerned. I am talking about the rate of exchange in relation to recovery.

Before we enter into any silliness such as sloganising and catcalls of "Labour devaluers", let me point out that the Heath Administration effectively devalued by 20 per cent. and the Conservative party lived happily for 20 years with a floating exchange rate. They never thought that it was a sacred cow which could not be discussed.

Let us at least try to be realistic, because we all want to get out of this mess. I recognise the fact that neither Front Bench can say the things that need to be said, but, in the light of my experience in four economic Departments and as one who is an economist by academic background, I am absolutely convinced that the goal that we seek is not attainable with the present rate of exchange.

The Prime Minister said that we were set for steady and sustainable growth. I want to explain why that is not possible and I shall bore the House with three figures which demonstrate the magnitude of the problem. From the North sea we have had a £130 billion balance of payments benefit in a decade, but, in that same period, with that bonus to the balance of payments, we ran a deficit of £25 billion. Therefore, our basic non-oil deficit is £155 billion. That is where Conservative Members start and also where we start on the other side of an election. So I hope that we can try to consider the matter in a mature and sensible way—I do not mean that patronisingly.

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor have said that the Government's chosen option is a consumer-led recovery. But a consumer-led recovery is an illusion. We have heard of fool's gold; a consumer-led recovery is fool's IOUs.

For long-established reasons, people in Britain have a tendency to spend 36 per cent. of the extra money in their pockets on imports. If we get the consumer-led growth for which the Chancellor aims, and £9 billion is put into circulation as a result of the change in mortgage interest rates, it will draw in an extra £3 billion worth of imports.

If Conservative Members think that I am being alarmist, I ask them to read the autumn statement—the Chancellor made provision for the balance of payments deficit to increase by £3·6 billion in this financial year, because he recognised the inevitability of the process that I have described.

I have three precedents to show that this is a not a short-term or new situation. I do not pretend that it is caused by one party or another. It so happens that my precedents are taken from Conservative Governments, but I do not make the point in a party-political sense. I wanted to take one precedent from each decade.

In 1958, Harold Macmillan went for growth. In October of that year, for the first time since the war, the Government got rid of all credit controls. Twelve months later, there was the never-had-it-so-good election. Car sales had gone up by 30 per cent. and sales of domestic consumables by 20 per cent. Six months after the election, all the credit controls had to be restored, and by 1964 we were running a deficit which in terms of today's currency was £5 billion.

In the 1970s, the Heath Administration's having inherited what in today's terms would be a £5 billion surplus, Lord Barber—then a Member of the House and Chancellor of the Exchequer—made a dash for growth. Again, he removed all credit controls. Within a short time, inflation had risen to 15 per cent.—that was before the oil crisis hit us—and the balance of payments was in deficit again.

The Labour Government inherited that 15 per cent. inflation—and a fourfold increase in oil prices was still to come. Again, the dash for growth via consumer spending did not work; it ran into the ground. Conservative Members are very unkind to their colleagues sometimes—as no doubt we are, too—and the Chancellor of the Exchequer who was lionised for winning the 1987 election for them has now been attacked because his credit policies are in danger of costing them the 1992 election.

Those are three clear precedents that demonstrate what I am trying to explain to the House. Hon. Members can check them all for themselves. The lesson is that the higher the consumer-led growth, the higher the consequent trade deficit—and therefore the greater the pressure on the pound, the higher interest rates have to go, and the deeper the subsequent deflation—or even recession—becomes.

We all share the aspiration to get inflation down until it equals that of our competitors, but let us not believe that that is the way out. Reducing the changes in our prices to the level of the changes in our competitors' prices merely stops the gap widening. At least from that time we should be competing on equal terms, but the existing gap in our basic competitiveness would remain. We should have to get our inflation below the level of our competitors' inflation and, in the case of Germany, we all realise that that is an improbable target.

The only way out is export-led growth—in that I include import substitution. That can be achieved only if, at a stroke—to use a political phrase—we make our industry more competitive in the short term by removing our current competitive disadvantages. That means realignment of the currency.

Even that would work only if it were matched by a massive programme of increased manufacturing investment. It is no good devaluing without investing. We must have investment in order to take advantage of the situation. We have slack in our capacity now, so we should have an initial boost, but in order to reap the medium and long-term benefits of a devaluation, manufacturing investment must be there, to carry forward the export benefits established.

I should like to kick aside a silly argumentative delusion that is being allowed to gain currency—I am mixing every

[Mr. Alan Williams]

metaphor in the book. That delusion is the idea that inward investment is dependent on the existence of a single currency, or on absolutely stable exchange rates. History and the experience of everyone in the House show the opposite.

In the 1970s, when the Labour party was in government, we got inward investment to the highest level that had ever been achieved—that was with a floating pound. In the 1980s the Conservative Government, too, got inward investment to the highest level that had ever been achieved until then. That, too, was achieved with a floating pound. So the idea that I mentioned is an irrelevance which we can ignore.

The tragedy is that after 12 oil-rich years we are in recession. There has been no miracle—the Government have walked not on water but on oil, and now they are trying to walk on hot air. All that we have is a promise from the Prime Minister that British industry is the most competitive that it has ever been. I take that with a pinch of salt. The Prime Minister did not see the recession coming, and he did not see it when it arrived, yet he has seen the end of it before anyone else is aware of any light at the end of the tunnel. Sadly, the Government are living a long and a big lie. They hope that they can hold the election before the public discover the truth.

7.26 pm

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): My constituency has 55 per cent. of its people employed in manufacturing—the highest level in the country. Our dominant industries are textiles, aerospace and furniture. I have a personal involvement in tourism, in manufacturing, in construction and in investment, as detailed in the Register of Members' Interests. I therefore welcome the opportunity to contribute briefly to the debate.

I start by looking back to 1979, when the Government came to power. Industry and business were demoralised; taxation on individuals had gone up to 98p in the pound; there were controls on prices, pay and dividends. Business men were talking about emigration rather than expansion. The cry from business was, "Set us free, and we shall deliver the goods." That is what the Government did when they came to power.

We scrapped dividend controls, price controls and pay controls. Tough decisions were taken in the early 1980s. In constituencies such as mine, things were difficult. Textile mill after textile mill closed and unemployment rose to 16 per cent. in those difficult years. But during the 1980s, industry recovered and confidence returned. We succeeded in generating an enterprise culture in this country. Our enterprise zones—such as those at Lomashaye and White Walls, in my constituency—have been a great success. They are now chock-a-block. Our enterprise allowance scheme, too, was a great success.

Management became more professional. Increasingly, we became a strike-free country. The economy grew and, as the *Financial Times* said in an article today, about 500 new businesses were created each day during the 1980s. Sadly, towards the latter part of the 1980s, we had an excess of credit, an excess of borrowing, an excess of optimism and some over-inflated egos in the business community; the bubble burst. What lessons can we learn from that?

Too much of the expansion then, usually by acquisition, was away from the core business. There was an excess of borrowing and bankers too often threw caution and financial prudence to the wind. Too many financial deals and business deals were fee-driven, and the merchant banks and stockbroking firms had vested interests in deals being done. Too frequently, entrepreneurs ignored the time factor and failed to realise that it takes many years to build a successful business. Too many tried to develop too quickly.

Over the past two years, we have been through a difficult and tough world recession. Trading conditions are difficult now. It is tough out there—unless, of course, one is a receiver. The conditions in my region in the north-west in relative terms have improved. Unemployment in Pendle, although it sadly rose, is now just short of 7 per cent. compared with the 16 per cent. of the 1980s, and our unemployment is now below the regional and the national average. As I said last week in the House, the north-south divide has ceased to exist as an issue.

The Labour party's proposals offer industry very little. The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) talked about a defence diversification agency. She is not here now, which is sad because I had planned to ask her whether she could give us some examples of products that those industries might manufacture. The Labour party has talked about a minimum wage. As Neville Bain, the chief executive of Coates Viyella plc and one of the leading figures in the textile industry, has pointed out, if a minimum wage were introduced, a considerable number of textile jobs would be transferred overseas. The higher taxes which the Labour party proposes would be unlikely to stimulate business men to invest. Labour seems to imagine that if there were a Labour Government and a Labour Chancellor, he would find a lever in the Treasury labelled "economic growth" which no one else had been able to see.

I want to speak briefly about tourism. I was Minister with responsibility for tourism and I am now involved in tourism as chairman of County Holidays Ltd. and of ALVA, the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions. By the year 2000, tourism will probably be the world's No. 1 industry, yet in this country, we treat it as relatively minor and unimportant. Rocco Forte, the chief executive of Forte plc and the president of the British Hospitality Association wrote in an excellent article in the *Evening Standard* this week, tourism employs one in 15 of the world's population and one in 10 in Europe. In the latter 1980s, tourism and hospitality created almost 1,000 net new jobs a week. I urge the Government when they consider the possibility of reorganising the structure of government and Departments to consider after the election bringing together tourism, the arts, heritage and, perhaps, the film industry under a senior Minister to raise the overall profile of those sectors.

I look forward to the Budget on 10 March as one that will help industry and which will stimulate investment. I hope that there will be measures to help the motor car industry, as other hon. Members have said. I hope that the Budget on 10 March will provide the backdrop for a further and steady reduction in interest rates. The recovery in the economy will certainly come. The general election itself is causing many business men to hold back from investing. They are waiting for the result of the election. After the election, when we have been returned to office, there will be a surge in confidence and the country will then be on its way to recovery.

7.34 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry seemed to be saying two or three things. One was that there was a world recession which meant that there was nothing that the Government could do and that it was not their fault. He spoke as if that absolved him from any responsibility for what has happened in the country generally and especially in my region over the past few years. If it is true that the recession is a world recession, which I do not accept, the Government have no right to say to the electorate, "Vote for us and we will put everything right," because they have said that there is nothing they can do because the forces are outside their control.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) made a speech of his usual standard and was very commanding. The Secretary of State taunted my hon. Friend for having no business experience and he taunted others by saying that they had no industrial experience. He said that we needed men and women with such experience. If the result of 13 years of this Government is lying at the feet of people who have had business and industrial experience, and if we consider the unemployment, the closures of business, the poverty, the misery and the cuts in services which have swept across the country, especially in the north-west, all I can say is thank God some of us are business and industrial virgins. Those with experience have not made a very good job of it.

I was interested in the speeches by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), who is no longer here, and by the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee), who also comes from my region. I am glad, because I visited Pendle recently, that unemployment has begun to fall there. However, 7 and 8 per cent. are high levels of unemployment. That is a lot of jobs many people in his area and in mine are suffering the worst possible effects of unemployment.

The Government said that we spread doom and gloom around. Things are very gloomy in the north-west. It is very miserable in the north-west especially for many of the young people who grow up, leave school and then have nowhere to go. Business failures in the north-west rose more than 50 per cent. between the third quarter of 1990 and the third quarter of 1991. There was a 63 per cent. rise in bankruptcies and a 43 per cent. rise in liquidations. Most of those involved small businesses, many of which had been encouraged by the Government and by the banks to invest and to get on the road to prosperity.

Many of those involved come to see me about their difficulties, and I am sure that other hon. Members see similar people. Their difficulties include interest rates which went so high for many people after they had started their businesses and bad debts which they are unable to collect. The Government, having encouraged them to go forward, stood back and did nothing to help them.

In our region, we have had 322,000 job losses, one of the worst figures in any region. Although there has been a small rise in jobs in the service sector, which we were told would be the compensation, it has been the smallest rise of any region, at 6·4 per cent., which has not compensated for the enormous loss of jobs in manufacturing industry.

We have had an increase in unemployment of 98·6 per cent. in the north-west since 1979. That is a lot of jobs and a lot of people. Many people have been unemployed for at least one year and many others have been unemployed for more than six months. The tragic figure is that 36·6 per cent. of those unemployed are aged between 18 and 25. Many below that age have never had a job. Many of those between 18 and 25 have never had a job.

What has happened to that group of young people in this recession? What has happened to those who have never had a job has rubbed off on their younger brothers and sisters in our schools. They see no prospects and they have no hope. Daily from the television screens the message that comes out to them is that if they have not got a car—ours is among the smallest proportion of car owners in the country—if they have not got a telephone—the same applies to telephones—and if they do not have all the signs of prosperity, they are failures.

I agree with the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) about the need for training. Our policy on training is important because we have lost so many skills through unemployment. People have been unable to be trained to keep pace with new developments. Therefore, the important part of our policy, which must be put into operation the moment we become the Government in the next few weeks, is to start training not only those coming on to the labour market, but those who have been without a job for a long time. People find that the developments of technology and industry have overtaken them because they were not trained in the necessary skills. That is a waste and a tragedy.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): Is the hon. Lady making a pledge that the Labour party will find the money to increase the training budget?

Miss Lestor: That is an interesting question. It has saddened me over the years that the Government have always found the money—be it very little—to pay people not to work. Armies of unemployed people are dependent on social security and many are hard up. However, when people such as my hon. Friend the Member for Preston, who pointed to the needs of the country, suggest that we put money into training people to work, the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins) asks what money we shall use. The Government have wasted millions of pounds in revenue from North sea oil by telling people not to work and that there is no job for them. When hon. Members ask such questions they should consider reality.

The Government have talked about regional assistance, but, in the north-west region, preferential assistance has been cut by 80 per cent. since 1978—the largest cut in any region. As the hon. Member for Pendle said, the north-west has suffered from a deep decline in traditional industries that have not been replaced. Rather than invest, as is our policy, the Government have made cuts. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston referred to the job losses in our area and the fact that thousands of people have been put out of work. Jobs have been lost at Pilkington, in British Rail Engineering Ltd., in Bass, Marconi and British Aerospace in my constituency. Those skills will have been lost should those jobs ever return.

An important by-product of the recession in the north-west and in many other parts of the country is its effects on the young. A survey by Birmingham education department and the Low Pay Unit recently came up with the horrific figure that 43 per cent. of children in this country—some of them aged 10 but many others aged 11 or 12—are working illegally in supermarkets, garages, hairdressers, retail shops, takeaway outlets and so on. It is

[Miss Lestor]

appalling that the Government have allowed that to happen by failing to implement the Employment of Children Act 1973. They have repealed legislation that protects young people. The Government have allowed illegal working because it is a way of ensuring that the kids of the unemployed can work. They are being exploited and the Government are keeping quiet about that and will not protect them. That is absolutely disgraceful.

The Government say that they are the party of experience and of industry and that they understand such things because that is their background. However, the people of this country, particularly those in the north-west where there are many marginal seats, will say that, if the country has got into such a state under those men and women of experience, they should be replaced by those who have been out of power for so many years, but who understand what they have suffered and know how to put it right.

7.44 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): The hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) gave us just one positive glimmer of Labour party policy, which was the need for training. The hon. Lady should know that the Government have increased expenditure on training in real terms by two and a half times from what it was under the previous Labour Government. We have a proud record. One can add to that the amount that is spent on training by industry itself —and I have to take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) on this, because he grossly underrated the amount spent by industry. That figure is, by definition, not calculable, but it is at least £20 billion and it could be as much as £30 billion.

The hon. Lady, for the most part, followed her hon. Friend, the well-known doomster from Dunfermline, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) in denigrating British industry and the British economy. We are of course all accustomed to that, but the sad aspect is the damage that he does outside the House through his remarks.

The point of the debate is not whether there has or has not been a recession. Of course there has been a recession in virtually all parts of the industrialised world. We have to identify the true position in Britain and get away from the fog of doom and gloom of the Labour party. We then have to consider which policies offer us the best way out. That is difficult, because we have heard nothing from Labour Members about their policies.

The Opposition choose to ignore the situation in the rest of the world and the transformation that has occurred in this country since 1979. It utilises the sad national propensity to denigrate ourselves. We all suffer and understand the problems created by the media and the fact that good news ain't news: bad news is news. The intellectuals rush to spread the bad news as quickly as possible.

In 1979, a group of 16 left-wing economists published a book entitled "Is Britain dying?". Of course, there were 16 answers of yes. In 1981, a group of 365 left-wing economists asked a similar question.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Three hundred and sixty-four.

Mr. Whitney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Again, those economists got the answer wrong. Now, the latest pundits such as Jeremy Paxman—socialists to a man and woman—have seen their theories collapse. Socialism has collapsed throughout the world, and all they can do is attack the free-market economy.

Such economists and the Opposition are harming Britain, but reality is very different. Everyone understands that, despite today's difficulties, management skills are stronger and management direction and industrial relations are very much better. In the 12 months to November 1991, only 800,000 days were lost in strikes, compared with an annual average of 13 million days in the 1970s. We all remember the winter of discontent and the fact that, during the last 12 months of the last Labour Government, more days were lost in strikes than during the whole of the past five years. That is the background.

We have heard much of profitability and it is important to put on the record the fact that the profitability of British industry has increased. The latest "Economic Situation" report of the Confederation of British Industry pointed out that the United Kingdom's profitability rose markedly in the 1980s and that profit margins in the United Kingdom appeared to rise faster since 1980 than in either France or Germany. That is a fact which we do not hear from the denigrator of Dunfermline or any of his hon. Friends, but it is a fact.

The average annual increase in inward investment in Britain in the 1980s was 6·8 per cent. The average in the other G7 countries was 4·6 per cent. Such facts are either not known or not recognised by Labour Members. But because they are a reality, inward investment into Britain is so much higher—from Japan, the United States, and even from Germany—than investment into other EC countries.

The investing countries know that they have in Britain a positive and beneficial climate for industry. That fact is unrecognisable from the gloomy picture that is always painted by Labour Members. Despite the problems of recent years, there has been in Britain a net increase of 420,000 new businesses since 1979. No wonder the benefits of investing here are recognised, as are the results of the measures that the Government have taken to control inflation.

The next step forward—we must be positive, because we can expect nothing positive from the Opposition—must involve creating confidence. As many independent commentators, from the Governor of the Bank of England downwards, agree, the basic work has been done and the right conditions set. We must now continue to build up confidence so that the savings that people are now accumulating will result in a demand-led recovery.

We constantly hear the siren voices of Opposition Members echoing the cheap way out—devaluation—but Governments of both complexions since the war have tried that policy, and each time it has failed. An article in *The Economist* of 4 January 1992 was headed "The whine about sterling." It concluded that

> "the best hope of getting both prizes—lower interest rates and lower inflation—is for Britons to stop whining. If the markets were convinced that sterling would never be devalued, the pound would quickly rise."

I am certain of that. But the one way to ensure that it would not happen would be for the whining voices among the Opposition to be heard and, heaven forbid, for Labour

Members to be elected to power. That would be the way to destroy all hope of fulfilling the glowing prospects that, with the sound basis that we have created, beckon Britain in the 1990s.

I hope that responsible Opposition Members will in future have a care. They should not seek to alarm their constituents by making cheap political points in the election campaign. They should have a sense of responsibility over what has been achieved, for we need recognition of our successes and the prospects that lie ahead.

7.53 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): We have heard much in the debate and elsewhere about inward investment. We have heard not a word about, and there is no measure of, outward divestment. It is similar to trying to fill a bath with water and failing to notice that the drain plug is out.

In my constituency during the last year, and even today, we are witnessing the outward divestment of jobs overseas. A year ago, there were 850 jobs in Newport at Inmos Ltd. Today there are 450, and we have heard that, unless there is a massive investment programme, Inmos will close. What we are experiencing at Inmos is a kind of extended moonlight flit. Millions of pounds' worth of equipment has been moved abroad, along with key personnel, and while 400 jobs in the assembly department still exist, they are now in Malta and Malaysia.

Hon. Members will recall that Inmos was established as an investment of taxpayers' money to guarantee a British stake in high technology. Inmos had a remarkable record of survival and success in that highly competitive market. The transputer—the computer on a chip—was a quantum leap forward in semiconductor technology, and it is entirely British-designed and British-made.

As long ago as 1989, Inmos was selling 50,000 of the chips for about £50 million, a substantial sum but still only a small part of the £2 billion annual market for personal computers. In 1989, the first generation of transputer chips formed the smart nucleus of Japanese video telephones. They are used in the laser printers that are used in large numbers, in the House and elsewhere, and in the American space programme. The chip inside that equipment was not made in Osaka or California but designed in Bristol and manufactured in Newport.

The second generation of the transputer, the T-9000, was launched in April of last year and is manufactured in Newport. It is 10 times faster than its predecessor and is poised for mass sales, in collaboration with IBM, for a galaxy of exciting new uses, such as in colour fax machines, medical diagnostic equipment, high resolution personal computers and the amazing three-dimensional computers known as virtual reality.

Skin diseases, speech defects and diabetic blindness can easily be diagnosed and monitored with the help of computers fitted with transputers. They have other mundane uses for the mass markets, such as in controlling washing machines, in fuel injection systems of cars and in many military and defence uses. The transputer is now one of the most widely used processors. It was the first to offer the parallel computing equivalent of the power of supercomputers. A stunning fact about the British transputer is that it can carry out 200 million instructions per second.

The development has had some support from the Government and from the Esprit programme, but we are seeing jobs falling away because nobody is defending them. We shall find the French-Italian company, SGS Thomson—it has taken over the company, although it has no interest in it; it is a nationalised organisation under the control of the French and Italian Governments—taking action which will result in this miracle chip, which was created through the investment of British taxpayers' money and the innovative genius of British scientists, being manufactured overseas.

After a month of speculation, Inmos today announced that, unless there is a massive investment programme, the Newport factory will be closed and manufacture of the T-9000 will be transferred to Texas, France or Sicily. Two other fabrication centres have been established as part of the Thomson empire.

Electronics Weekly of 29 January last reported an industry analyst as having said that transferring the production technique, known as Elite, from Newport to three other sites

"seals Newport's fate . . . That pretty well puts the final nail in Newport's coffin."

That is a dire warning for my constituents.

The Inmos story is ideological. Instead of a judicious mix of free companies operating in the market, with Government intervention where appropriate—it is absolutely appropriate in Europe, because the French, Italian and other Governments defend their industries to a degree that we do not—the Inmos story is descending into tragedy.

It was born as an innovative, far-sighted, bold venture by the last Labour Government. It was shunned by the Thatcher Government, with their arm's-length disdain. They were always blind to its marvellous potential, so they neglected it and starved it of investment. Finally, they abandoned it and sold it at a knockdown price to the multinational company, SGS Thomson. We are now experiencing a crisis, the seeds of which were sown by the blind folly of that Government. The French and Italian Governments have a different view of how to treat their industries and we now know that, especially the Italians, are offering a rich investment in Inmos. That is why the company will be swallowed up by that fat, multinational company.

Inmos—a British invention, created by British genius and British work—has been left defenceless in the cut-throat competition of international trade. Unless the Government act immediately, Britain will lose for ever a dearly bought, irreplaceable lead in the phenomenal world of tommorow's miraculous technology.

8.1 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): The many industrialists I know in all sectors and regions of the country will be disappointed with the manner in which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) introduced the debate. Many of them will regard it as a smidgen too flippant and funny, and a wee bit too long on rhetoric rather than on the facts that they want to hear in a considered judgment about industry's problems and opportunities.

Because the Opposition has made serious charges in the motion, I did the same as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East—I went to the CBI. In the CBI news of October 1991 I found an article entitled "All sectors and regions expect upturn next year"—in other words, in 1992.

[Mr. James Cran]

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East places confidence in the CBI and so do I. I believe what it says about what will happen in 1992.

To be clear about what the business community believes, I shall quote from the first paragraph of that article:

> "A survey of firms' plans for the year ahead shows that all industries in all regions of Britain expect 1992 to see an upturn in business next year."

That was not a small survey of industrial opinion but covered 685 firms in 18 major sectors of the United Kingdom.

I then checked my region of Humberside or, as we like to call it, east Yorkshire. The *Humberside Economic News* for January 1992 says:

> "the County of Humberside looks to the future with optimism having just won one of the largest inward investments of 1991 with the announcement by Kimberly-Clark of their intention to build a 750 job paper products factory at Barton-upon-Humber."

I could quote other paragraphs from that economic review but, essentially, it is extremely optimistic. It concludes:

> "Recession in the UK and the US, and the political changes in Europe, have all contributed to lower investment horizons but Humberside continues to be resilient."

I note that Opposition Front-Bench Members are not listening—perhaps they do not want to.

Humberside Economic News was not produced by Conservative central office, or by me. Had I produced it, Opposition Members would have questioned me. It is produced by Labour-controlled Humberside county council, and it is perfectly clear that it does not support the Opposition motion. Rather, it leads one to examine what is really happening in British industry. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not deal with that. He told many funny anecdotes and made many funny allusions to advertising companies but he did not deal with what Opposition Members are fond of discussing—manufacturing industry.

I have a large manufacturing company in my constituency—British Aerospace. The aerospace and defence industry in this country has achieved annual sales of £13 billion and a positive trade balance in 1990 of £1·1 billion. That industry is the second largest of its kind on the globe, beaten only by the United States. I wonder how industrialists and members of the work force in aerospace and defence companies throughout the country will regard the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. I know perfectly well that most of them will think that they cannot go to Opposition Members for support because they simply run industry down time and again, and it has happened again this evening.

I should have liked to ask the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East why Rolls-Royce, for instance—a superb company by any standards—has quadrupled its share of world markets for jet engines since 1987. It did not achieve that out of thin air but because it has a superb management and work force and because the Government are creating an economic environment in which the company can make such achievements. The Opposition may say that, rather than quadrupling its share of world markets it should have increased it by five or six times. Let us hear how they would achieve that. We are proud to be able to say that that company, under a Conservative Government, quadrupled its share of the market in jet engines.

I could mention other companies in that sector, such as Dowty, GEC, Lucas, Smiths Industries and Westland, all of which are world leaders. I do not call them world leaders. Rather, the latest document on manufacturing produced by the CBI does so. Indeed, their competitors in other countries also know that they are world leaders. It is a pity that the Opposition do not know that.

I had intended to mention motor vehicles, but I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) wishes to speak, and I would not dream of intruding on what he will say because he is more expert than I. Instead, I shall speak about the mechanical engineering sector, which is a £32 billion industry. In 1990, 40 per cent. of its output was exported. It has a trade surplus with the European Community and a positive worldwide balance of £2·5 billion. Should we not be proud of such a record? I know that my hon. Friends are proud of it and I want to hear what Opposition Members have to say about it. They have not mentioned the achievements of the mechanical engineering industry, because it does not suit their book to do so. It is a successful sector.

The mechanical engineering sector has seen the resurgence of the machine tool industry to the extent that it is now the seventh largest in the world. Specialist magazines on that subject show that British machine tool technology leads every company in the world in sensors, grinding techniques for jet engine blades and laser-cutting techniques. Again, it did not suit Opposition Members to mention those facts.

I could mention chemical and many other sectors, but I do not have the time. I simply wish to illustrate that British companies have, in the past 13 years, undertaken a major restructuring programme. They were fat, flabby and inefficient in terms of world markets, and that is no longer the case.

In the early 1980s, ICI's return on assets was below 10 per cent., which was an utter disgrace by any international standards. In the second half of the 1980s, that increased to 20 per cent. on average return on capital employed. That was achieved under a Conservative Government.

British Steel was suffering from an advanced case of rigor mortis. Now it is privatised and is one of the most capable and efficient deliverers of steel products. Its pre-tax profits for 1989-90 were about £773 million. Why do not we hear about that from Opposition spokesmen? The reason is that it does not suit them, because they want to run down British companies and British industries by devious means. They think that, if they say something often enough outside this place, someone may believe them and vote Labour. I am merely trying to show that British industry has a lot to shout about, and Conservatives are doing the shouting.

I have heard much tommy-rot today on the subject of regional policy. It is easy for Opposition spokesmen to say, "Let's have regional policy." What does that mean? It simply means that, in the 20 years between 1964 and 1984, successive Governments spent £20 billion on regional policy to create a net 500,000 jobs, for about £40,000 each. They were like snow on a spring day—here today and gone tomorrow. If Opposition Members want to pontificate on regional policy, I should like to hear something novel, not a regurgitation of policies that have failed in the past.

I am ebullient about the future of British industry, but only if we have a Conservative Government. If a Labour Government get into power, we will be back to the days of 1970s and failure.

8.12 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The brilliance of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has been underscored by the simple fact that not one Conservative Member could bring himself or herself to say a word of praise of the speech of the Secretary of State. That tells us all we want to know.

What has emerged from the debate is that there is a recession, and it has been made worse by Government policies, from which we in Scotland are clearly suffering. The Prime Minister and his colleagues are in an undignified rush to find the maximum number of countries that are in difficulties. Even when they try to identify them, they list countries such as Japan and end up with egg on their faces. Any time now, I expect the Prime Minister to start complaining about bad economic circumstances in the republic of Bolivia—even then, I am not sure that the comparison would stand the Government in good stead.

In the remarkable performance of the Secretary of State —[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The judgment of Conservative Members on such matters is well known to the House and to the country, so the intervention does not come as a surprise. The remarkable speech of the Secretary of State contained a reference to the film industry, an important sector of British industry. If ever there was a dismissive reference, that was it. That industry was promised so much—the present Home Secretary said that it would have a renaissance, but it is not producing as many films as it did after the war.

It is also clear that there is a recession in Scotland, where unemployment in December 1991 stood at 227,000 —26,500 more unemployed than a year ago. We are talking about people, families and communities such as mine in Strathkelvin and Monklands district.

I asked my two local district councils for up-to-date information on their problems. I should love to quote everything they said, but time would not allow me to do so, even if I were not limited to 10 minutes. Strathkelvin district council said:

> "In October 1991 total unemployment in Strathkelvin stood at 2767 which represented an increase of 23·9 per cent. over the year. The figure for December rose to 2857, ie. approx. 8·4 per cent."

In the past year, a list of recent redundancies have been effecting the Monklands district. Conservative Members almost seem to ask us to believe that such a scene does not exist. However, there have been redundancies in William Purdie, Henry Bannerman, Shanks and McEwan, Terex, R. B. Tennant, MSA, Cobalt UK, Honeywell Bull, Geest, Tibbit and Britten Ltd., Lambertons, Lane Orthopaedics and Alexandria Workware. In addition, there has been the spin-off from the appalling announcement about Ravenscraig. If such statistics do not reflect a recession, I do not know what does. Earlier, we were asked to rely on the record of British Steel, but it was that company which said that it had brought forward the proposals for Ravenscraig by two years due to economic circumstances. Who created those economic circumstances?

The references to the Confederation of British Industry do not seem to have included what we know to be its views in Scotland. The "Scottish Quarterly Industrial Trends Survey" produced by the CBI in January showed that the recession in Scotland remained severe and that what signs there may have been of recovery had, if anything, disappeared, not become stronger.

The survey reported:

> "General business confidence and export optimism have deteriorated markedly over the past four months . . . Profit margins continue to be squeezed".

It continued:

> "Investment intentions in plant and machinery have worsened since October".

When my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East and others referred to those simple facts, they were giving an accurate account of what was happening in our constituencies. We would be failing in our duty if we did not draw such factors to the attention of the House and offer the Labour party's alternatives.

The steel industry has been decimated, but where are the proposals for manufacturing? Ravenscraig is being closed and Gartcosh in my constituency still stands idle. One reason for that is that the paper recycling plant on which so many hopes were based cannot get off the ground due to Government policies and high interest rates.

The House underestimates at its peril the problems that we in Scotland face. I am sorry that no SNP members seem to be present, but their policies, particularly during the recession and the economic nightmare that the Tories have provided for us, are most uninviting. Industry will not be helped by separatism and a separate Scottish currency. It will not be helped by export papers and documents having to be exchanged at the borders of our two countries. Above all, industry will not be helped by separated interest rates to which the SNP policy of independence will inevitably lead.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Where is the Scottish National party today?

Mr. Clarke: SNP Members are absent during a vital debate on unemployment and the recession in Scotland —a debate which is about more than mere slogans. The European Community is moving towards economic and monetary union. Therefore, for the SNP to argue for a separate currency seems to be an argument more suited to the 19th than the 20th century.

I believe that Scottish people will consider such matters sincerely. It cannot be good for Scottish industry to cut the home market from 55 million to 5 million, and to make England simply a foreign market. That is a high price to pay. I prefer the alternatives that the Labour party offers, which include a Scottish parliament able to deal with these matters in a more informed way than has been obvious from the remarks of Conservative Members this evening.

During these difficult times, we demand a strategy for investment, for manufacturing and for exporting. Our growth rates do not begin to compare with those of Germany, France, Italy and Spain. There must be a new commitment to investment and training; it is that commitment which Labour policies represent.

The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) —[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—who still seems to have some support on the Conservative Benches, but very little elsewhere, promised a property-owning democracy, among other things. I must tell those who still applaud the right hon. Lady that people in my constituency who face high interest rates and whose businesses are going to the

[Mr. Clarke]

wall, not to mention high mortgage rates and the consequent repossessions, are looking for the same sort of apology from the right hon. Lady that the chief executive of TV-am received from her when she had the decency to write to him to say that she did not expect that her policies would lead to the outcome that emerged.

The alternatives offered in this debate are clear: stagnation with the Tories, with all the unemployment, poverty and deprivation that go with it, or progress with Labour. In the coming months, the people of Scotland and Britain will make the inevitable choice, and will go forward with Labour.

8.21 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): It is a funny thing, but detectives always say that the villain who has committed a crime will inevitably turn up sooner or later at the scene of his crime. I cannot say how true that is generally, but it is certainly true in politics.

The evidence of this is that, after 12 years of Conservative government, the shadow Chancellor and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) came to my constituency as part of Labour's "Buy British" programme, a programme designed to endorse investment in training and manufacturing. These two came to my constituency to visit the Rover plant, the former home of Red Robbo, of trade unionism run riot, of over-production, dereliction, nationalisation and the virtual destruction of the motor industry. They came, they saw and they said that it was absolutely tremendous—the company had invested; it had new training programmes; it had an advanced form of productivity and of relations between management and workers. It represented the way forward, in fact.

Rover is not, however, an isolated example. The same thing is happening throughout the length and breadth of the country. If only the Opposition would get out and visit our businesses and factories and see the enormous changes that have taken place over the years, they would learn that Rover is not alone.

We know that the Opposition are no friends of the British motor industry—certainly no friends of Rover. Only a few days ago, when the European Court of Justice referred the £44 million-worth of sweeteners back to Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan, I was thrilled to death, because Rover and British Aerospace need the money and were certainly the innocent parties in that transaction. But the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East criticised the Commissioner, saying that he was negligent and incompetent—and he criticised the Government for being negligent. So he wants the money to be paid back. He wants to draw it out of Rover and British Aerospace even though it is being used for investment in new models and new jobs. The hon. Gentleman is clearly no friend of ours and nor is the Labour party.

Dr. Reid: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. King: No, I am short of time, and the hon. Gentleman, not surprisingly, will not like what I have to say.

Rarely can a country have been blessed with a second chance like the one that the Government have given this country, in the form of the British motor industry. The *Economist* intelligence unit has said that the like of the improvement has not been seen for 40 years, as investment programmes increase and accelerate and provide the jobs and factories for people to work in over the next few years.

I offer in evidence the findings of Professor Garel Rhys, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders professor of motor industry economics, who has calculated the scale of the advances being made in the British car industry. The total 1990 output from our manufacturers Rover, Ford, Vauxhall, Peugeot and Jaguar amounted to 1,290,000 units. The professor has forecast that, by the year 2000, that will have risen to 1,950,000 units. Meanwhile, the new producers, Nissan, Toyota and Honda, produced no more than 106,000 cars in 1990—they were all produced by Nissan—but by the year 2000 this group will be producing just under 1 million units. All that means that the car industry in Britain will be producing about 3 million cars a year by the turn of the century—up from a low of just under 900,000 units a few years ago. That is a tremendous improvement, sure proof that under the Conservative Government the right investment decisions have been made.

This improvement has come about because we have been able to embrace much of the technology that the Japanese have given us in the form of manufacturing techniques for lean production, which makes our manufacturing units more efficient and more effective. The process has permeated the suppliers to our great motor industry as well. World players such as Lucas Automotive, SKN, BBA, Turner and Newall and BTR are the equal of any European component manufacturers. With the opportunity to supply the expanding British car sector, they will certainly remain world players for a long time to come.

The recession should not deter the industry's plans for advancing, but we look forward to a helpful Budget to accelerate that advance. Our economy is much more car-fuelled than it was in the past. We need new sorts of cars for a greener world—they are essential for environmental improvement.

We have achieved all this by means of a number of devices. First, we reformed the trade unions. We reformed working practices, and we gave people a stake in their future through home ownership, higher take-home pay and tax reductions, which are essential to motivate working people.

We have reduced company taxation and we have accelerated our training programmes. The process will continue by establishing exchange rate stability so that we can expand our export market, which is up by 50 per cent. in the past 12 months alone. We need to embark on further cuts in taxation to stimulate the economy further and produce more customers for our products.

The Opposition claim that to get out of any recession we need an investment-led expansion programme and more training. What we really need is more customers to buy the products. If there are more customers, the training programmes and investment will automatically follow—British manufacturing will make sure of that.

We want lower interest rates and we are achieving them. We need low inflation, and we are certainly achieving that. The contrast between 1979, when we inherited inflation that had risen to 25 per cent., and today is stark. We have got inflation down to 4·5 per cent., and it will be even lower. What a contrast that is with what Labour offers the country. It offers us nothing at all.

The Opposition want to adopt a minimum wage which will have a colossal impact on differentials in British industry as people try to readjust their incomes accordingly. Labour has no commitment to a road-building programme. The British car industry needs its products to arrive at the factory doors on time; we need good roads for that.

The Opposition would further increase taxation on the car. They would increase personal taxation, which would have a disastrous effect on those working on the shop floor who might put in some overtime and find themselves being taxed heavily for the privilege. The Opposition would create so-called regional development agencies, which would act as a wet blanket over investment decisions. They would endeavour to pick winners, which would mean that one company's handout was another company's tax bill.

The Opposition would end flexible working by embracing the social charter and restricting the number of hours that people can work in a week if they choose to. That would only play into the hands of our European competitiors, who are envious of our more efficient working practices.

If we try to embrace the ideals of the Labour party we will find ourselves unable to compete for inward investment. Labour talks about an investment-led recovery, but, as I have already said, the only recovery that really counts is the one that the customer will bring with him by buying the products that we make.

Finally, the Labour party would abolish the uniform business rate, which has done an enormous amount to stabilise costs. If it were not in position, small and large businesses would be held hostage. Many Labour councils, uncapped and free to spend what they liked, would, of course, turn to business and extract every last shekel which would otherwise have gone to investment and development.

The opportunities for this country have never been greater. We are at the beginning of a period of substantial expansion of our motor industry. The track record over the past few years shows that it has been producing the right quality of product for the customer in the home market as well as the export market. We hope that the Government will look very carefully at Budget proposals, so that a cut in the 10 per cent. special car tax will stimulate those very important car market sales.

It may interest the House to know that, unfortunately, the January car sales figures show a 6 per cent. decline in home market sales compared with the same period in 1991. Indeed, January's sales this year were the lowest since 1981. Much of that is offset by very much greater export sales, as a result of export-led production, but, if we want to capitalise on the tremendous opportunities offered by this inward investment, largely fuelled by Japan, but also by multinationals in this country, we have to ensure that there is a good, growing and strong home market. If we can achieve that, and I am confident that we can, we can usher in a new economic future of great significance for us all.

8.31 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I do not want to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) in that economic nonsense except to ask this: if there has been such an economic miracle and the Government have done such wonderful things, why are we in such a mess now? Why are we in a recession that is generally agreed to be becoming, if it has not already become, the worst recession since the war?

This has been a depressing depression debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) gave a brilliant analysis of the nature of the problem, but all the Minister could counter with, like a petrified parrot, was that the position would be worse under Labour. He went on to chant that mantra throughout his speech. He was a pathetic spectacle.

The Minister did not explain why we went into the recession earlier and got in deeper than any other country. He held out no hope to the unemployed, rapidly increasing in number, or to companies hanging on and struggling not to go bankrupt with the banks squeezing them in the most monstrous fashion. Small businesses have been betrayed by the banks. He held out no hope for anybody of any possibility of a recovery. All he could offer us was Micawbernomics—wait and see. If we go on squeezing inflation and get it down to graveyard levels, he said, there might, eventually, be some recovery.

To say recovery will come with low inflation is absolute nonsense. At this time we need some increase in prices, just as we did in the 1930s. There was an interesting article in the *Financial Times* on Monday, with Anthony Harris pointing out that Roosevelt proposed a toast and popped out the champagne when prices began to rise, because prices need to rise if manufacturing and industry in general are to make a profit. That is the trouble at the moment. Companies are exporting, but not at a profit. They are just struggling to keep going. They are throwing overboard research, design, development and investment—everything that we need, in order to survive. They have to generate a profit, and that means that we need an increase in prices.

That is the central issue that is not being faced in this debate. If we are to recover from this recession, there has to be a reduction in interest rates and in the exchange rate. the central problem now is the balance of payments. If the balance of payments is high in a recession, as it is, it will be disastrous in any expansion. We cannot have expansion unless we get the exchange rate down. A competitive exchange rate is the only way to channel resources into investment, into industry and into closing the balance-of-payments gap.

The only way out is to use the price mechanism to make exports more competitive and cheaper, to make imports dearer, and, most important, to allow industry to generate a profit on the basis of which it can expand and grow. That is the only solution to the problem. Without an expansion of demand and without channelling that demand to manufacturing in this country by making production in this country profitable, which at the present exchange rate it is not, there cannot be a recovery. We have to make it pay to produce in this country. We have to allow manufacturing to generate a profit.

Unfortunately, too, by entering the exchange rate mechanism at an overvalued rate, which was 20 per cent. overvalued in real terms against the deutschmark on the last quarter of 1986 and about 40 per cent. against the dollar, we made it impossible for industry to generate a profit, and nailed the lid down on the recession. We have tied ourselves to the German economic cycle. The Germans want to deflate, and we need to expand. We have forced industry to cut jobs, to cut investment, to struggle

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just to survive, to try to regain the competitiveness it has lost through the exchange rate. Companies have to run faster just to stand still, and it cannot be done.

There is an analogy in the relationship between America and Japan. America is in substantial deficit with Japan. Japan is gaining an increasing hold on the American market and taking over an increasing number of American industries and companies. In that situation, America would be regarded as a little bit daft if it went in for a full single market with the Japanese; it would be regarded as insane if it had a common exchange rate with the Japanese; and it would be regarded as totally lunatic if it entered that exchange rate with an overvalued dollar. Yet that is exactly what we have done with our major competitor, Germany, with which we are in the same situation as the Americans are with Japan. That is the analogy, and that is the trap in which we have landed ourselves.

The result must be disaster. It must mean that deflation and recession now become a way of life. This is part of a necessary downsizing—the need to squeeze us out of dollar markets and into focusing on the European market. It means a sustained balance of payments deficit. That cannot be brought down at this exchange rate. It means a sustained fiscal deficit, because unemployment will rise, Government spending will have to go up and tax receipts will go down as profits fall and people are put out of work.

We are already talking of a public sector borrowing requirement next year of over £20 billion—an underestimate, in my view. One can see the horrors to come in that situation. It means cuts in the standard of living, because industry is unable to support it. It means that we suffer in terms of trade, because the basic staple of trade is still manufactured goods. We need to produce them and to export more of them. It means that we are cutting back on our industry.

The drive motor of our economy is being deeply damaged by the prevailing economics in this country. Indeed, it is being ruined. We are losing jobs in manufacturing. Every plant we close, every job we lose, every bit of production that is lost in this country, means a worse balance of payments problem later because we shall be importing more.

We are not only in a hole; we are digging it deeper by the way that the economy is run. Nobody can make water flow uphill, no matter how hard he may try. The exchange rate is not a phallic symbol, so that we are proud when it is hard. It is not a test of our enthusiasm for Europe; it is not a means of disciplining the economy, like the dominatrix's whip. It is simply a market-clearing mechanism. It has to be brought down to competitive levels if we are to produce in this country, if we are to invest in this country, if we are to make a profit in this country, if we are to rebuild the industrial base on which everything rests, which provides the jobs and pays our way in the world, which generates the surplus for investment and for public spending and on which all depends. That base is now shrinking. It is already dangerously near the limits of viability. If this recession is allowed to go on, if no action is taken, disaster lies ahead.

We are in exactly the same situation as in the 1920s, when we went back to the gold standard at an overvalued rate. Every pundit, every party, every economist, told us, then as now, that the exchange rate was not important, that it was a means of maintaining discipline and of forcing industry to cut its costs. The consequences were ruinous and eventually we were forced, in 1931, to abandon that exchange rate.

We shall again be forced to abandon it. I want to avert the damage that would be done; the ruin that would be brought down on viable companies that might be forced out of business; the closing of pits, steel plants, and other industrial plants; and the ending of other forms of production—all of which would be viable with a competitive exchange rate—just to keep this country tied to an overvalued exchange rate mechanism. That way lies disaster.

8.39 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): In Victorian times, my great grandfather was a Free Church minister in a village not 25 miles from Dunfermline. As I listened to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) in full denunciation, it crossed my mind that the tradition of hellfire sermons in Fife is still alive and strong. However, while all good hellfire sermons were full of denunciation and wit—as was the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East—the best of them placed some emphasis on the positive, and that was lacking from the hon. Gentleman's speech.

It would have been a better speech had the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East recognised that, between 1981 and 1989, this country enjoyed eight years of sustained economic growth, during which manufacturing output rose by 25 per cent. overall. That was the longest period of sustained economic growth since the war.

It would have been better also if the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East had said more about productivity. Over that same period, productivity in British manufacturing industry rose by 50 per cent. Associated with the rise in productivity was a significant investment surge—particularly towards the end of that term.

That strong investment growth and substantial increase in productivity lie at the heart of the success that British exporters are enjoying today, at a time of considerable world recession, in maintaining and increasing this nation's share of world trade.

The other feature of the hon. Gentleman's speech was his consistent failure to say much about Labour policy. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East was mighty good on the negative, but when it came to the positive, we heard hardly a whisper.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): The hon. Gentleman said nothing positive.

Mr. Irvine: He did, in that he made a few dangerous positive remarks to which I shall refer later.

I suspect that if, heaven forbid, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East found himself Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, he would be tempted to meddle. Governments of any colour are always tempted to do that, but this Government have been better at resisting that temptation than many others. Labour Governments in particular are tempted to meddle, and their meddling is usually dangerous.

There would be pressure on a Labour Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and his colleagues to pick winners and to back projects for which commercial support could not be found. We all know how dangerous and expensive it can be for the taxpayer and the country when Governments are sucked into high-cost, commercially unviable ventures.

That apart, there would be even more dangerous party pressures on the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, as Secretary of State, to assist declining industries, prop up uncompetitive companies, and frustrate necessary but difficult commercial decisions. Consequently, companies in the new industries that are looking to the future, and on which this country will depend in the next century, would have to pay to meet the costs imposed on an incoming Labour Government under pressure to implement the policies that I have described.

There would be a further danger. My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) said that there was nothing positive in the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, but he concluded by mentioning regional aid.

Mr. Dewar: Excellent.

Mr. Irvine: The word "excellent" echoes across the Chamber from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). That confirms that Labour is strong on regional aid. It always has been—but regional aid has its dangers. Labour all too often forgets the harmful effect that regional policies can have on companies in, for example, East Anglia and the south of England, which fall outside the scope of regional assistance.

My constituency of Ipswich is an East Anglian town which has the advantage of a well-balanced economy. It is strong in the financial services sector, but also boasts a significant manufacturing sector, whose companies could all too easily be put at risk by irresponsible, over-vigorous regional policies.

Ipswich industrialists already complain that, from time to time, insubstantial companies establish themselves in parts of the country that lure them with generous regional assistance, grants, and other inducements. They find themselves in competition with well-established, effective companies in other places—such as Ipswich, the rest of East Anglia, and the south of England—to which such grants and inducements are not available.

In other words, the established companies are subject to unfair competition, with the consequence that their profit margins are pared, they are forced to put back their investment plans, and they are compelled to postpone export drives, to beat off what is essentially unfair competition.

I am not against all regional policy, because there is a place for it—but if it is too vigorous and gives too much weight to political pressures from areas of the country where Labour is strong, it can inflict a lot of damage on companies and their employees in parts of the country that do not receive regional aid and other inducements.

What industry really needs is not intervention, or assistance of the kind that Labour would proffer. It needs an economic climate in which profitability is encouraged, industrial achievements are recognised and given full credit, Governments do not frustrate sensible commercial decisions and unnecessary, nitpicking, expensive bureaucratic restrictions and requirements are not imposed. With such a framework and economic environment, industry will prosper; and I believe that a Conservative Government would be far more likely to provide them than a Labour Government.

8.50 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): It is clear to me that Ministers are conning their Back Benchers. We are facing a general election, and I have no doubt that many Conservative Members will never be back here after that. If they continue to be hoodwinked by Ministers, they are heading for an ignominious defeat. I am also amazed to note that the Opposition Benches are empty of Liberal Members—and, moreover, of members of the Scottish National party, who claim to want to fight for Scotland.

For years, I have pleaded with Ministers not to visit my constituency. Every time they do, a factory closes a week later, and 100 or 200 jobs are lost. I have asked the Secretary of State for Scotland on bended knee not to send Ministers to my constituency on propaganda visits, because I know that absolute disaster will result. Not long ago, after I had asked a Minister not to visit my constituency, lo and behold! he visited my constituency. What happened then? A factory went into liquidation, and hundreds of jobs were lost. The same thing happens every time Ministers visit my constituency.

It is all very well to talk about recession; but let us consider what the word really means. Let us put a face to recession. A young lad in my constituency was training to become a baker. I know his father and mother, and I know him very well. The lad was enjoying his training, but his employer then forced him to work seven days a week. He was supposed to be paid £8 for working on Saturday and Sunday, but he could not get that £8. The owner of the company told him that he had no rights. "Take it or leave it," he said. "You will work, you will do what you are told and you will not answer back—and I am not paying you for working on Saturday and Sunday."

The boy explained that he had to deal with some personal and private business on the coming Sunday, and that he would prefer not to work on that day. He was told that he must do so; when he persisted, he was fired.

Such people have no rights. Their rights have been taken away by the Government. The recession has made things so hard that young people have no voice: they are so desperate to find jobs that they will take anything, on any conditions. That is exactly what the Government want. That is why they have stopped young people having any rights and any say in their conditions of employment. It is disgusting and disgraceful.

Let me give another example. A security guard who spent 20 years in the armed forces and fought for his country is now unemployed. He used to work in the Talbot car factory, but it closed. What have the Government done to replace Talbot jobs in Scotland? Next to nothing.

When the factory closed, the man obtained a job as a security guard in a Ministry of Defence Establishment. He was paid £1·85 an hour, and he had to bring up a young family on that wage. No hon. Member could do that; we spend more than that on drink here in half an hour.

That man was fired because he tried to speak up for his rights. I have discovered that security guards in Ministry of Defence establishments at Coulport and Faslane are working not just 10 hours a day, but, in some cases, 30 or 40 hours consecutively. They are desperate for money—

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which is not surprising, given that they are being paid £1·85 an hour. They are virtually having to sleep on the job. It is appalling that the Government are not giving them proper protection and proper rights. They refused to sign the European social contract, which would have saved that security guard a good deal of heartbreak and poverty. Can it be right that we are forcing men and women to work for such an unbelievably low rate—a poverty rate? Is that not incredible?

Let me ask the Minister a question that I have asked other Ministers. Does he know the price of a pint of milk? Does he know the price of a loaf, a tin of beans, half a dozen eggs? Does he know what food costs? If he does not know that, he will never understand what he is imposing on men, women and young families.

Because of the recession, many companies in my area simply do not know where they are going. They are now issuing short-term contracts. A big shop that had not been open for long was hit hard by the recession. It had expected not to do bad business; all of a sudden, it tore up the contracts and re-employed all the work force on short-term contracts.

It gets worse. I have talked about a young man who was training to be a baker but who lost his job, and about a security guard paid only £1·85 an hour. Not long ago, my secretary was working in a catering job for £2·45 an hour. That was slave wages because she had to work around the clock. I wonder whether the Minister's wife would work for that sort of money. I am sure that no member of his family would work for such a wage. My secretary was forced to do so because of the prevailing economic circumstances caused by the Government's mismanagement of the economy.

When the Government set up local employment centres, we were told that they would provide training for all the young people in Scotland, help us to face the 1990s and compete with the rest of the world. What happened? They cut the training budget by 33 per cent. They cut 33 per cent. off the budget in Renfrewshire. It is mind-boggling that they should claim to have introduced that panacea while still denying people proper training.

I can supply the names of people for whom training was terminated and who were thrown on the scrap heap. I remember a Minister telling us from the Dispatch Box that the Government would guarantee training and a future job for every kid in Great Britain. It is absolutely—I am trying to use only parliamentary language, but it is difficult when I am talking about the problems in my area—it is disgraceful.

Since the Government took office, over half the manufacturing jobs—166,000—have been lost in Strathclyde alone. The Minister simply keeps telling us that we are coming out of recession. In my constituency, the Talbot car factory has closed, India Tyres has closed, Caterpillar has closed, shipyards have been closed, Prestcold has closed and Howden has closed. The job losses run into thousands and industries are being decimated, but the Government still blunder on.

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor say week after week that we are coming out of recession. They tell us that we are doing fine. They are like the two Ronnies. It is as if they are following a script from "Only Fools and Horses". The Cabinet is full of a bunch of comedians and ham actors. We would be better off with Del Boy and Rodney running the country.

In my area, the people are not a bunch of comedians or ham actors. The people of Renfrew, West and the rest of Scotland want the right to work. My area offers good people who are desperate for training. We offer good sites, good communications, a decent road system and good airports and sea ports. Yet the Government squander millions of lives by forcing them to stay on the dole.

The Armitage Shanks factory in Barrhead in my constituency is world-renowned. It is closing. The Government are doing nothing but weep crocodile tears while that company abdicates its responsibility to the people who made it great.

I may have made a few jocular comments, but this is no joke. It is no joke that young people in my area have no home for the future. It is disgraceful that the Government claim to want equality and a classless society while allowing young people from my area to sleep in miserable poverty on the streets of London.

I am delighted that this is probably the last time in this Parliament that I shall face the Minister across the Dispatch Box. I am sure that, when faced with the ballot box, the young people of Scotland will know where the future lies. I am sure that they and the young people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland will know that the future lies with a Government committed to providing an opportunity for people to survive. We will provide an opportunity for people to develop and bring out their best. We will offer a caring society and give everyone the right to live decently, harmoniously and peacefully. Only a Labour Government will offer that.

9.4 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Anyone listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) today would think that everything was fine with British industry in the balmy days of the 1970s and that everything has gone wrong since. Let us inject a little fact.

In the past four years, exports of manufactured goods rose by a quarter. The aerospace industry throughout the world has experienced problems, but in the 1980s and early 1990s ours substantially increased its share of world markets and recently overtook France to become the second largest in the world. Our pharmaceutical companies—the high-tech industry that we want—are the leading exporters in the world. In the 1980s, our manufacturing output and productivity rose faster than any other major European economy.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Absolutely untrue.

Mr. Oppenheim: That is true. I shall happily give way if the hon. Gentleman has figures.

Mr. Hood: Will the hon. Member tell the House how many manufacturing jobs we lost during the period to which he is referring?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman questioned whether manufacturing output and productivity had risen faster in Britain than in any other European country. The answer is that they rose faster in the 1980s than in any other major country. Manufacturing jobs in Britain have been lost in every decade since the war; 500,000 manufacturing jobs were lost and unemployment doubled under the previous Labour Government. *[Laughter.]* Before Labour Members get too carried away with their own self-righteousness, they should remember the record of their party when it was in office.

Let me give Labour Members some facts. In the 1970s, British Steel made a loss of £15 billion. Every year, we had a £1 billion deficit in steel products, and British Steel was the largest loss maker in the world. In the past few years, we have had a £1 billion surplus a year in steel products, and British Steel is the most efficient steel industry.

In the 1970s, all the multinational car makers were falling over themselves to move capacity from Britain to Europe. Ford and General Motors were moving component and engine plants from Britain and were importing many cars. General Motors, Ford and all the multinationals are now investing billions of pounds in new component and engine capacity and, for the first time in 20 years, are exporting significant numbers of cars. In addition, Japanese companies are making huge investment in this country.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Has not the hon. Gentleman got his figures wrong? Does he agree that it took the Government until 1988 to reach the manufacturing levels of 1979? What should I tell the people of the United Kingdom and Scotland when 2·5 million people are on the dole; when 180,000 people are homeless, 34,000 of them in Scotland; and when 10 million people are living in poverty, one in four of whom are children? How will we get out of the mess that the Government have got us into?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman's figures are wrong. Manufacturing output in Britain rose by 25 per cent. in the 1980s, but it fell under Labour. Those are not my figures or Government figures but are from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. If the hon. Gentleman denies them, he should have a word with the OECD.

People who have lived in Amber Valley for a long time tell me that, in the 1960s and 1970s, when unemployment was higher under Labour, the area was broadly dependent on coal and old industries. The area now has a diverse high-tech manufacturing economy. Of course there are problems in the area and it is suffering from the recession, but there are more better-quality high-tech manufacturing jobs on a more diverse industrial base than in the 1960s and 1970s.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East had the cheek to mention miners who had been made redundant. Let me tell Labour Members what happened to redundant miners in my area when Labour was in power. More miners were made redundant in the 1960s and the 1970s under Labour than were ever made redundant under this Government, and they were given only a pittance in redundancy pay. At least, when men are made redundant from the mines now, it is done with dignity and they get a good amount of money, which never happened when Labour was in power. Labour disgracefully neglected miners who were made redundant. No amount of sanctimony, cant or moral indignation will let people in my area forget that important fact.

During 45 minutes of bile which passed for a speech from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), there was not a single mention of the policies that any future Labour Government would pursue. The electorate is entitled to ask, where's the beef?

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the success of the Japanese economy. Let me tell Opposition Members that the Japanese economy has hardly succeeded through socialist policies. There has been little nationalisation. What little there was in the state sector has now been privatised. Japan has had low Government spending, low taxes and minimal taxes on savings. In Japan, unlike Britain, there have been few of the anti-business and anti-profit attitudes which have been fostered by Opposition Members. Above all, the Japanese have had a rigorous and vocationally oriented education system.

Some Labour Members think that Government subsidies, through the Ministry for International Trade and Industry, have helped Japanese industry to success. That type of interventionist myth is popular among Opposition Members. They might be interested to know that Japanese industry has been subsidised less over the last 30 years than any other major industrial economy. Most of Japan's successful industries, like cars, robotics, electronics, photocopiers and information technology, have received virtually no help from MITI and the Japanese Government. Indeed, they generally spurn such help. Conversely, the least successful Japanese industries tend to be those which have had the most interference from Government.

There are two reasons why the Japanese economy has done so well over the past 30 years. First and above all, the Japanese have had a sound, rigorous, vocationally oriented education system. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. It is very distracting to have a second debate going on below the gangway.

Mr. Oppenheim: Many Opposition Members have wandered in from too good a dinner. It might do them good to listen to what is being said rather than to behave like drunken, post-dinner idiots.

The other main reason for Japan's success economically is that since the war, like Germany, it has consistently followed a sound monetary policy which has involved reasonable state spending, no budget deficits and the encouragement of savings. That is an important point at a time when the Opposition are proposing a policy of raising taxes on savers. It shows how little the Opposition have learnt over the past few years.

High levels of savings reduce consumption and bear down on inflation and interest rates. Above all, they provide a good pool of capital for industry to invest. If a country does not have high levels of savings, it will not have high levels of investment. It is wrong for the Opposition to think that they can boost investment at the same time as taxing savers to the hilt. Again, that shows how little they have learned since the dark days of 1970, when a Labour Government last imposed an investment income surcharge on savers.

Yes, we have problems. To a large extent those problems were caused by interest rates being kept too low in the 1980s which led to too much laxity in monetary policy. Opposition Members should remember that at that time they were urging even lower interest rates on the Government. Many other countries made the same mistake, with the result that they had similar problems of

[Mr. Oppenheim]

excess inflation and excess monetary growth which they now have to wring out of their economies. It is worth reminding Opposition Members, who deny that other countries have economic problems, that the United States, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand and Canada have all had deep recessions; many of those were formerly successful economies.

Entry into the ERM may have exacerbated the problem, but I believe that it has been a necessary discipline. It will lead to a fundamental shift away from over-consumption to a more productive savings and investment orientated economy.

In the 1980s, Britain underwent significant improvements in industrial productivity and efficiency due to policies which were opposed tooth and nail by the Opposition. Our biggest remaining disadvantage is the poor quality of much of our education system. Education is crucial to a successful advanced economy. There may have been a time when countries could get away with low calibre work forces and a highly educated elite, but nowadays manufacturing industry needs flexible, decentralised and sophisticated work forces, which is why the changes that we are introducing in the education system are crucial to our future as an industrial and manufacturing nation.

Our policies are dealing with the weaknesses in our education system. Labour's control of many of the worst local education authorities shows that it has contributed to the problem and learnt nothing, because it is opposing all of our much-needed education reforms. Labour's pledges to increase spending show once again how little it has learnt. Increased public spending means crowding out the private sector and reduced private sector investment. Taxing savings means a reduction in the investment which could create manufacturing jobs. Those policies show how little it has learnt. Labour is not part of the cure. In fact, it is and always has been part of our industrial problems.

9.15 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Like my city's position in the Government's priorities, I always seem to be at the fag end of debates. Nevertheless, I should be less than honest if I said that I was participating in this debate because of the Secretary of State's robust defence of his stewardship of his office.

The hon. Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Sir A. Glyn) fell asleep and half the people in the Gallery walked out because they found the right hon. Gentleman's defence less than riveting. His speech was characterised by a series of obfuscations and evasions and by downright ignorance. He seemed to have a peculiar unwillingness to grasp the responsibilities of his office. We heard an absurd argument about additionality being somehow metaphysical. I can say only that his understanding of philosophical terminology is even less than his understanding of his office. In fact, his argument was tautological and he should go back to his philosophy textbook and find out what it means.

We have been painted as the party of doom and gloom. The Secretary of State struck me as a Tory Hamlet without the charm. To find doom and gloom I have to go no further than the TSB's United Kingdom economic outlook for January this year. Its first paragraph states:

"December's economic data paint a gloomy picture particularly for the Government which had heralded a recovery in the second half of the year."

It goes on to state the bald fact that

"in the three months to November, output fell by 0·5 per cent., and was 1·5 per cent. lower than a year earlier."

The Secretary of State made great play of innovation and research and development. I was tempted to intervene and ask him what he thought about, for example, GPT. That company invested a lot of money from its Plessey days in research and development. It developed the system X form of telecommunications, but it is now closing huge sectors of that operation and jobs are being lost. More importantly for the telecommunications industry in this country, huge reservoirs of expertise are being broken up and thrown away. Once again, we shall lose a world lead in a particular branch of R and D.

That company showed innovation, but where was the support from the Government? I know that the Government met union representatives at the company, but only last week more redundancies were announced. Where does it end? Where is the support for such firms?

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and I visited the factory of Precision Hydraulics, a company in my constituency. We heard the old shibboleth about the trade union movement and the damage it has done to industry. My hon. Friend and I visited a factory in a city which is much derided by the Government. That factory had 100 per cent. union membership, and there were good relations between management and unions. It was a high-tech factory, exporting hydraulic pumps to Japan West Germany and America. It was a leader, and its staff worked sensibly together. The overwhelming impression with which I came away was that those people would do a damn sight better if we had a Government who would give them some support.

The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) tells us that he wants to deal in facts. I shall tell him some facts. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East described the Government's abdication from regional policies. I shall give examples drawn from the north-west, involving two major companies. In 1980, 62 per cent. of the work force of ICI was based in the United Kingdom. In 1991, that proportion was down to 38·5 per cent. That is a fact—jobs have been exported.

The proportion in Pilkington has gone down even more dramatically—from 65 per cent. in 1980 to 27·6 per cent. last year. That is a fact. Pilkington's jobs and expertise have been exported.

We have heard all the facts about unemployment. We know that 306,900 people are unemployed in the north-west, even according to the fiddled figures. We know that the north-west has lost 322,000 jobs. Even taking into account the increase in self-employment, we have lost 181,000 jobs. That is a fact.

The North-West Business Leaders Forum consists of 30 major companies which have come together. It is a fact that those companies are keen on a regional development agency. They certainly identify more closely with our plans for the future Labour Government than they do with those of the present Government.

I am conscious of the time limit, so I shall finish with one more important fact—the distribution of the unemployed in the north-west. At the general election we shall be watching the Bury seats, the Bolton seats, and

Hyndburn, Pendle and Wallasey seats. The results that Labour achieves in those areas will show in electoral terms people's recognition of the damage that the Government have done to the infrastructure and the economy of the north-west. The electorate will be in no doubt. I shall make one safe prediction: when we have a Labour Government, the largest number of Labour Members of Parliament will represent not Scotland but the north-west.

9.22 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) that no one will be happier about the fulfilment of his prediction than Scottish Labour Members.

There has been a certain predictability about the line of argument in the debate. There is no doubt that Conservative Members know what they are supposed to say. They take the line from those who are their seniors —if not their betters. We have heard a remarkable number of excuses and explanations.

The Secretary of State, whose remarks were echoed by many of his hon. Friends, told us that all the problems that we mentioned were the problems of other countries in the world and of the recessions that they had manufactured. One Conservative Member even told us that what was happening in Britain was all America's fault.

I was fascinated by the most prevalent line of argument —that my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was acting improperly in some way, because he spoke about the situation as he saw it. We were led to believe that there was a patriotic duty not to tell the truth about the Government. I am used to the theory that one should not be disloyal when abroad, but it is new to me that even in the House of Commons we must watch what we say, in case we frighten the workers. That is an extraordinary proposition. In the months ahead, when Conservative Members populate the Opposition Benches, I shall greatly look forward to watching them practise the restraint that they now preach. I shall be surprised if I am impressed by their performance in that respect.

The Secretary of State said that the Labour party was intellectually paralysed and near brain-dead. Some of my hon. Friends suggested to me that that was a state about which the right hon. Gentleman could talk with some authority. But, to be fair to him—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] I shall be fair to him, because few other people manage to do so. There were moments when realism broke through. His remarks about the state of the Japanese economy were interesting. He clearly found the metaphysical distinction between slow growth and recession rather hard to pin down. For a minute, I thought that his words on that amounted to a disagreement with the Prime Minister.

The Secretary of State also told us that it was always very difficult to know when we were coming out of recession and that it sometimes takes months to be sure what is happening. That was some sort of explanation for why he and most of his Front-Bench colleagues have been consistently wrong in their economic projections over the past 18 months. If I am not mistaken, it amounted to as near an apology as we shall get from the right hon. Gentleman.

In a few minutes, we shall hear a closing speech by the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs. I find that a rather surprising appearance in the debate. I would have expected someone from the Scottish Office to speak. I might even have expected someone from the Scottish Office to put in an appearance at some time in the debate, even if only for two or three minutes. The Scottish Office has a big team, yet there has been not one sign or trace of the Scottish Office. The Under-Secretary's possession of a membership card for the No Turning Back group is not a substitute, although he may have been told by one of his hon. Friends that that is a welcome characteristic at the Scottish Office. However, it is not a substitute for a Scottish Office Minister. I realise that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) is ill, but surely one of his colleagues could have had the courage to turn up.

I can deduce, as many others can, only that the Scottish Office is running away from the problem. Are we really to accept that the Scottish Office no longer has any interest in industry? Are we really to believe that the recession does not hit Scotland hard? If Scottish Office Ministers think that, they should think again.

I will talk about Scotland, and I have no doubt that the Under-Secretary of State will represent the Scottish Office case as fairly as he can. I do not envy him the task. In his new year's message, the Secretary of State for Scotland —I do not expect that the Under-Secretary has read the document, and I do not recommend that he does—put a remarkable gloss on the situation. I thought that it was a message marked only by total unreality. I will give the House a brief quote. The Secretary of State said:

> "The evidence is mounting that Scotland is on the road to economic recovery. Business confidence is rising across most of Scotland. Growth in the Scottish economy should become apparent soon"—

a note of caution there—

> "and our economy should grow steadily through 1992 and beyond."

The Secretary of State talked generally not quite in terms of an economic miracle, but at least of the Scottish Office equivalent thereof.

The kindest explanation is that the Secretary of State for Scotland has reached the point at which he finds it impossible to face reality. He does not want to know—a feeling that often comes with the conviction that nothing can be done. Our essential case is that something can and should be done.

On 29 January 1992, the Secretary of State for Scotland answered a planted question from the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim). I notice that the hon. Gentleman, having made a speech in which he overran his time, has now departed the House. He is the kind of gentleman who gives a public school education a bad name in Scotland. His planted question gave the Secretary of State a chance to set out his industrial policy—and a sad fist he made of it. However, he made one straightforward claim for which I am grateful. He referred to his policies —[HON. MEMBERS: "The hon. Gentleman is here."] I do not apologise to the hon. Member for Amber Valley. He has been in and out of the Chamber like a ghost and I think that he has no more substance than that legendary figure has.

The Secretary of State made a proud claim. He said:

> "The success of my policies and the work of my Department can be shown through the progress Scotland has seen over the past 10 years."—[*Official Report* 30 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1191.]

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

That is the test that he wants us to apply—the progress that Scotland has made over the past 10 years. I will spend a couple of minutes looking at the 10 years that have passed and at the progress that has been made.

Taking the Government's first 10 years, employment in manufacturing industry declined in Glasgow by 52 per cent., in Motherwell by 45 per cent. and in Dundee by 43 per cent. Scotland lost more than one third of its manufacturing base—the equivalent of more than 200,000 jobs. In the past two years the situation has deteriorated even further, so I do not believe that there is any evidence of the recovery of which the new year's message spoke.

Ministers show endless ingenuity when it comes to discussing unemployment—it is one of their favourite Rorke's Drift defensive positions. Unemployment has risen harshly from a similar comparison base of 140,000, when the Government came to power, to almost 230,000. However Ministers reply by saying, "Ah, there may be more people unemployed, but there are also more in work."

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) has done a great deal of work on this issue. If one compares the situation in September 1979 with that of September 1991, one sees that the number in work has come down sharply by 150,000—or by more than 7 per cent. That is the number in employment. However, the total work force is down by 26,000. That does not take into account the sharp increase in the number of women part-time employees. It does not challenge the fact that the Government are now counting those in Government training schemes as being in employment—they were not included in 1979. Nor does it take account of the fact that the Government count those with a second part-time job as two employees. If one makes allowances for that, it is clear not only that unemployment has risen but that the numbers in work have dropped greatly.

During those 10 years, Scotland's share of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product has fallen from 8·8 per cent. to 8·3 per cent. Between 1979 and 1990, Scotland's share of GNP in manufacturing fell from 8·5 per cent. to 7·8 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. Scotland's GNP per head in 1991, expressed as a percentage of the United Kingdom figure, stood at 92·6 per cent. That is the lowest it has been since records were first kept on a comparable basis in 1971.

The Secretary of State has the darned cheek to put out new year messages and to tell us at the Dispatch Box that he is the possessor of a fine record and a success story. The index of production and construction currently shows that production is falling more quickly in Scotland than it is in the United Kingdom as a whole. The economic blizzard is blowing in a way that totally obliterates the claim, which was made with some plausibility at the beginning of the recession, that Scotland is suffering a little less drastically than other parts of the country.

The casualty list lengthens. Dun and Bradstreet records that there were 7,950 business failures in Scotland in 1991—an increase of more than 76 per cent. and well above the United Kingdom figure. The list of job losses is endless. I am able to give only a small selection from the past couple of weeks' which includes companies such as Armitage Shanks, Clydesdale bank, Rosyth, Gates Rubber in Dumfries, Hughes Electronics in Glenrothes and Ravenscraig itself. However one looks at it, that is not a list that gives confidence for the immediate future. The range, variety, and scale of those losses is daunting.

The Secretary of State has been deserted even by his own traditional allies. There has been much talk today about the advantage of looking at the economic scene as a man of business. A number of people have put on a touching act of "where there's muck, there's brass" and to show that they know how many beans make five. I should say that it was rather unlikely character acting in some cases.

It is worth noting what those in business and industry are saying, because a different picture begins to emerge, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East pointed out. Let us take the Scottish CBI survey—*[Interruption.]* I hear someone snorting in a way that the CBI would not find particularly attractive.

Mr. Whitney: I was snorting because the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend—the denigrator from Dunfermline—has misquoted the CBI time and time again. As I said earlier, the CBI has pointed out that, since 1980, this country's industry has grown much more strongly than that of Germany or France. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has totally disregarded any quotations from the CBI about that. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, 12 minutes ago, that something must be done, and, 12 minutes on, I would like to know what must be done.

Mr. Dewar: If the hon. Gentleman manages to produce a few more phrases such as "the denigrator from Dunfermline" he may get a job with Saatchi and Saatchi, but unfortunately that company will not be able to take him on, as it is not hiring because of the recession. In any event, at a time when German production has grown by more than 20 per cent., the British figure is only 6 per cent. If that is a sign of strength, the hon. Gentleman has a strange sense of proportion.

The CBI in Scotland said in its January report:

> "General business confidence and export optimism have deteriorated markedly over the last four months. Profit margins have been squeezed, investment intentions in plant and machinery have worsened since October."

The Scottish chambers of commerce business survey said that demand is

> "stagnant or continues to contract across all major sectors."

So even in the business sector—or perhaps particularly and understandably in business and industry—there is total disbelief about claims that are being made by a Government who are rapidly being stripped of all credibility. I find it very irritating indeed—wounding, indeed, to my constituents—when I look at the problems and prospects that they face, when I consider the deprivation that is growing in our communities and when I listen to the complacency that is peddled daily by Ministers.

The Conservatives are not the only people making a claim, so a comment about the nationalists—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] I should perhaps apologise. I had hoped to be making these comments in the presence of the nationalists because, after all, the debate deals with a recession that is striking hard in Scotland. Unfortunately, they have not put in an appearance during the debate, so I must speak in their absence.

I make it clear at the outset that I accept that Scotland is capable of sustaining independence. Some of the poorest areas in the world are independent states and some of the richest, such as California, choose to be part of a wider political and economic union. The question is not can we but whether it would be wise to take that road.

The dishonesty that must be challenged is the assertion that Scotland needs only a political operation to break the ties with the rest of Britain and every problem will be solved. The myth that a separate Scotland would, by some mysterious chemistry, become a land of milk and honey is a case that makes no sense, based on arithmetic that does not add up.

The nationalists would have us believe that oil revenues would meet every emergency and plug every fiscal gap. Oil is an asset in relative decline and is inevitably time-limited. This year, the Treasury estimates a yield to the Government of between £1·2 billion and £1·4 billion. It may increase for a short period, but the take will always be affected by international prices and the concessions necessary to encourage the development of marginal fields.

It cannot be right to advocate a major constitutional upheaval on the optimistic assumptions that the nationalists have made about the yield from the North sea. It is calculated that about £4 billion would have to be found per year to maintain present levels of public expenditure in a separate Scotland. On present projections, that would still leave a huge funding gap. What would be the answer—lower public expenditure or increased taxation?

The most important question I wish to address is whether separatism would encourage or even allow the growth of a modern, competitive manufacturing economy. The SNP advocates a fully-fledged Scottish currency, Perhaps that will raise a cheer at the SNP conference, but it would have serious consequences for Scotland's manufacturing industry.

The nationalists ignore the dramatic impact of reducing the home market from 50 million to 5 million at a stroke. If the nationalists really believe that there would be a differential interest rate between Scotland and England, what would there be to stop capital moving south? Investors based in what was Britain may well come to Scotland, but for cheap loans, while the differential, and nothing else, would survive.

Scottish industry must sell to live. It cannot survive on its domestic market. Do the nationalists seriously suggest that every time a Scottish company sold goods south of the border—and there would be an international border if the nationalists had their way—the deal would have to take account of a fluctuating exchange rate and a foreign currency transaction?

Professor David Bell of Stirling university argued that case forcefully in an article in *The Scotsman* earlier this week. In doing so, he underlined the futility of the whole exercise. Why pay such a heavy penalty in terms of dislocation and disruption? What price Scottish influence in major monetary decisions once Eurofed is in place? Only the first division players in the Community will have the leverage to influence central bank policy if EMU is introduced.

Professor Bell stresses the inescapable problems that would come with a separate currency. He argues that

"the disadvantages of introducing a Scots pound are obvious —dislocation of the financial Community, an obstruction of normal trade flows."

He concedes that it will be a potential political advantage if the experience allowed the Government to determine effectively the best rate at which the Scottish pound could join the monetary union. His conclusion, however, is uncompromising. He says that the short-term introduction of a separate currency would be "an extraordinarily difficult exercise". Scottish industry, too, would regard it as an extraordinarily damaging process.

Labour's case for a Scottish Parliament is firmly based on democracy and good government. It is a scheme tailormade for Scotland——

Mr. Whitney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Opposition chose as the title for the debate

"Government policies and the recession in British industries".

How is the debate between the Labour party and the Scottish National party about devolution relevant to that subject?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is making his case. I have heard nothing out of order.

Mr. Dewar: The plans proposed in certain quarters of Scotland would have a damaging effect on industry. I should have thought that that was of interest to all hon. Members.

There is a strong industrial case for the powers of a Scottish Parliament, as outlined by the Labour party. As European integration proceeds and competition policy develops, the emphasis is bound to be on the supply side. Governments, whether in an independent Scotland or the United Kingdom, will concentrate, as a Labour Government will, on research and development, encouragement and investment, and training and skills. A great deal will depend, especially in Scotland, on the development of essential infrastructure. Scotland will want to invest in the energy and capacity of the people, which will be the task of the new Parliament, shaking off the dreary record of the last decade, which has left current investment in manufacturing below 1979 levels in real terms.

What is happening in Scotland—the depressing, hurtful statistics to which I referred earlier—is typical of what is happening in many parts of Britain. I listened to the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Eccles (Miss Lestor), for Preston (Mrs. Wise) and for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). They mentioned the problems of firms such as Pilkingtons which link their constituencies with mine. We all recognise that their problems are pressing. We must attack the problems of training and skills and get away from the insults referred to at the beginning of the debate. Employment action, so hyped by the Government, has created only 263 jobs in Scotland. We must raise that investment from below its 1979 level, where it has been disastrously stuck for so long, and do something about infrastructure links if we are not to end up at the wrong end of Britain and the outside edge of Europe.

There has been much talk about experience. Conservative Members said that it was the key to the Government's success, but they have translated experience into prejudice and into doing nothing. They deny all responsibility and blame everyone else. The experience of the electorate will make them decide that it is time for a change.

9.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): That was an interesting speech on devolution. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) seems to protest too much. Perhaps he is worried about being crushed between the anvil of Scottish nationalism and the hammer of Tory Scottish unionism—as he will be at the general election.

As for the hon. Gentleman's criticism that a Scottish Minister is not replying to the debate, he knows that that is a low blow, because the Scottish Minister responsible for industry is ill and the Secretary of State for Scotland is in Scotland. I could ask the hon. Gentleman the following question: as there are two English Ministers, why have the Opposition not managed to field an English spokesman, when there are two Scottish spokesmen? There are seven industrial virgins as spokesmen—not one Englishman.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman well knows that the Secretary of State for Scotland is my opposite number, and he has had knowledge of this debate for well over a week. I think that he should have been here—and I think that Scotland will agree.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman knows that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has an appointment in Scotland that he cannot break.

We have heard another dreary list of statistics from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) said, as boringly predictable as Pavlova's dog—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The debate has been orderly so far, and I ask the House to give the Minister a reasonable chance.

Mr. Leigh: As my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) showed from his own experience—which the Opposition do not have—the CBI "Industrial Trends" in his district shows that confidence is increasing.

Claims have been made about inadequate investment —particularly by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. There are bound to be fluctuations in investment over the economic cycle. Investment responds primarily to expectations of future demand, not tax incentives. What has depressed investment of late is a cylical downturn in demand and activity. It would be totally counter-productive to attempt to offest that effect by creating artificial stimulae—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to Opposition Members that I hope that the debate is not being televised in Scotland, as it will not provide a very good example.

Mr. Leigh: The Opposition do not like it; they do not listen to arguments. They did not listen to any Conservative arguments.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) made clear, one does not solve such problems by throwing taxpayers' money at them.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) made an interesting speech on the importance of investment in manufacturing infrastructure and infrastructure generally. He spoke of transport but did not mention the fact that, over the next three years, investment by British Rail and London Transport is expected to be 50 per cent. higher. He did not mention that investment in health is £250 million higher or that housing spending is set to rise by 17 per cent. He did not menton that capital spending on schools will rise by 7 per cent. or that spending on law and order was set to rise by £106 million.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) was right to speak of unemployment in her constituency. However, in her attack on the defence industry in the north-west, she did not explain how her policies would result in anything less than a dramatic fall in employment. She attacked arms sales worth millions of pounds to the north-west and thousands of jobs, but failed to mention those losses.

Two of the most interesting speeches——

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leigh: No, I shall not, as I have so little time.

Two of the most interesting speeches from Opposition Members came from the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr Mitchell). I had thought that Opposition Members supported our membership of the exchange rate mechanism, but it seemed that those two members were attacking our membership. They talked as though they were in favour of devaluing sterling.

Mr. Alan Williams: I was attacking not our membership but the level at which we entered the ERM, which is different. I made it clear that I was expressing a personal opinion, not a party one.

Mr. Leigh: The right hon. Gentleman is a former Minister and spoke with great authority. He seemed to be speaking the truth, which is staring Opposition Members in the face. Their policies would result in a devaluation of our position in the ERM.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye and other hon. Members stressed the importance of education and a training budget. The Government are committed to major investment in this area. The Department of Employment is investing more than £2·7 billion in training, enterprise and vocational training this year. That is no less than two and a half times as much in real terms as was spent in 1978-79. Industry and employers have an important role in deciding the type and level of skills needed by the work force. I am encouraged by the latest "Industrial Trends" survey, which shows that more firms are planning to increase their spending on training.

The Government believe that research and development expenditure decisions are for the market to take, but industry's funding of its own R and D rose by 43 per cent. in real terms between 1983 and 1989.

The Government are investing £170 million in export services, employing 200 private sector advisers to make sure that the money is well spent.

In the remaining few minutes of this debate, I want to ask the Opposition a question that I asked the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East a year ago. I am still waiting for an answer to it. I asked him then whether a Labour Government would be prepared to waste money coaxing investment over and above what the market provides and deems necessary. As I said, the hon. Gentleman refused to answer that a year ago. I should be happy to give way to him if he would like to estimate how much his proposed incentives will cost the taxpayer; secondly, how much net additional investment that would create; and thirdly, what effect any such extra investment will have on the growth of GDP. Fourthly, I should like to ask whether the hon. Gentleman agrees with Credit Lyonnais, which states that it hardly makes sense to impose a savings tax on the very capital that we would all like invested in industry.

Before the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East answers these questions—I am sure that he will try to—he might ponder the fact that total investment in the British economy runs at about £100 billion a year. So what is his answer? None is forthcoming, because Labour's policy is a sham. The amount of investment needed to make any real difference would mean that the extra taxation to pay for it would destroy the economy.

Then there was the farce of the announcement by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) in favour of an emergency package—a package quickly disowned by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) almost the next day. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said that we would have to wait for growth before implementing that package: help the patient once he has recovered.

What money will be provided for Labour's national investment trust, British technology trusts and regional development agencies? I am prepared to give way to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East if he will estimate for the House how much money he will give those bodies. If a national investment bank ran on a commercial basis, why would we need it?

Labour Members talk of the need to support British technology. The old National Enterprise Board, designed to do just that, was able to borrow up to £750 million. Did it fail because it could borrow too much or because it could borrow too little? Opposition Members will not answer these questions, because they cannot answer them.

Finally, I repeat the question asked by the Secretary of State earlier today. If there were a run on the pound, as virtually every commentator expects in the unlikely event of a Labour victory, would Labour raise interest rates to maintain the pound's parity or would it devalue? That is a choice that every Labour Government has had to face, and every Labour Government has done both—they have put up interest rates and devalued. The silence of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen in the face of history speaks eloquently. Four questions, four silences.

There is one question which the British people will ponder above all others in the coming weeks. How does it help small business men seeking to keep their businesses going and growing, how does it help the young married couple seeking to pay their mortgage, how does it help the large company seeking to remain competitive in world markets if they all end up paying more taxes? We will go on asking that question and, I suspect, receiving no answer to it, because there is none.

Mr. Graham: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leigh: I will not; I have asked several questions and received no answers.

The film "JFK" now showing in our cinemas reminds us of the implausible magic bullet which killed the President, and no one quite believed it. But they had to believe it, because the alternative of conspiracy was too awful to contemplate. In the same way, Labour's industrial policy is a kind of magic policy. It puts up taxes, it piles on red tape, it gives power back to the unions, it lets inflation rip, it does all the things guaranteed to damage industry, and yet, hey presto——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the Minister does not give way, hon. Members must resume their seats.

Mr. Leigh: Hon. Gentlemen do not really believe it themselves, but they cannot bear the horrible truth. It makes them shudder to think of it. They know that, after 13 years of Opposition supply days, a complete policy review never knowingly under-relaunched and a risible prawn cocktail offensive, they still cannot convince people that they can be trusted to run the economy. Their feeble new industrial policies—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Leigh: Their feeble new industrial policies have about as much impact as one man against a block vote at their annual conference. Their old knee-jerk prejudices —higher taxes, more red tape and power to the unions, with a cheque in the post to Walworth road, would wreck British industry's hard-won success. There is no big idea; it is simply a big lie.

That is what is on offer from the Opposition. Let us see what industry wants. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston made clear, industry wants low inflation. The Government have made the defeat of inflation their top economic priority. They have not shirked the tough measures necessary to bring inflation down.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) made clear, industry wants good industrial relations. The Government have systematically improved the framework for industrial relations in Britain. A proper balance has been achieved, enabling managers to manage for success. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) said, industry wants low taxation. The Government have cut corporation tax to the lowest level in the industrialised world.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) made clear, industry wants freedom to plan and invest for growth. The Government have swept away administrative and bureaucratic controls and regulations, allowing firms to get on with the business of making quality products at competitive prices. The Government have returned loss-making state corporations to the private sector, where their performance has improved dramatically.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren) made clear, industry wants access to overseas markets. The Government have played a leading role in arguing the case for freer and fairer trade both within the European Community and within the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

There is therefore a contrast to draw. The Opposition claim to be a friend of business but offer crumbs compared with the scale of activity in the United Kingdom—crumbs which within the rule of Beckett's law they cannot even afford. Our party is committed to the framework for growth, to creating the conditions for growth and letting those who are able get on with the job. We assist, of course, and our watchword is focus and cost-effectiveness in the support that we give. The Opposition revel in great phrases, but their promises amount to waste. Their only measure of success is the sheer quantity of other people's money that they seek to squander.

The contrast is all too stark. We created the framework that delivered industrial resurgence in the 1980s, a performance unrecognisable after the lost years following

[Mr. Leigh]

1974. The framework through which this transformation was achieved is still in place, under fire with recipes for dependency on the state. The Opposition would only tinker with and corrupt initiative, re-create dependency and divert attention from a fiercely competitive world. Once the present downturn has passed, the future is there for all to embrace. Of course there is hardship. Of course the present mist will clear, and industry will emerge stronger, leaner, and better placed to face the competitive challenges of the 1990s.

Our amendment tells it how it is. The preconditions for recovery are there. The framework is there. Our policies are there, and the will of the people——

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided. Ayes 187, Noes 292.

Division No. 73] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*

Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Farr, Sir John
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James

King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham

Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy

Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its success in bringing down inflation; recognises the importance of maintaining the fight against inflation to maintain competitiveness; acknowledges the success of British manufacturing industry in reaching record figures for exports despite depressed world markets; rejects the high tax; high spending policies of the Opposition which City forecasters predict would cause an increase in interest rates and inflation and would be an impediment to recovery; condemns their anti-industry policies of nationalisation, state control, a national minimum wage, renewed union power and unqualified support for the social charter which would have damaging consequences for jobs and industry; and notes that all these policies have been rejected by business.

EMPLOYMENT

Ordered,

That the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 84 (Constitution of standing committees), paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 86, (Nomination of standing committees), and Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.) shall apply to the draft revised Code of Practice on picketing as if it were a draft statutory instrument; and that the said draft revised Code be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That in the course of its consideration of the Matter of the proposals of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, the Scottish Grand Committee may meet in Edinburgh on Monday 24th February at half-past Ten o'clock, and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees) the Committee shall have leave, at that sitting, to sit until half-past three o'clock, and that sitting shall constitute consideration on two days for the purposes of Standing Order No. 97 (Matters relating exclusively to Scotland).—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Sub-postmasters

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10.14 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): In raising this subject on the Adjournment, I want to say that it concerns not only myself as Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West but my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Sir R. Rhodes James). Like me, he has raised the matter at Post Office and ministerial level.

On the night of 18 November, the Hills road post office in Cambridge was broken into and approximately £21,000 and valuables were stolen. The sub-postmaster, Mr. Habib Khokhar, my constituent, has been charged with the offence of robbery by the police. The case has yet to be heard. I shall not refer to it as it is sub judice, except to make the general observation that everyone is innocent until proved guilty.

Mr. Khokhar's son, Mr. Naeem Khokhar, was sub-postmaster of another post office at St. Johns road, Cambridge. Both sub-post offices were closed by the Post Office authorities, and both the Khokhars' contracts were terminated—despite the fact that all charges against Mr. Naeem Khokhar have been withdrawn.

The result has been intolerable inconvenience to many of my constituents—particularly to pensioners—who regularly use those post offices, and particularly over the Christmas period. In a busy area like Cambridge, that is not good enough. There is no reason why those post offices could not have been kept open, with alternative or temporary staff, while the matter was clarified. Both the Khokhars were willing to make all papers available and stay away from the post office while the matter was investigated and clarified.

The Post Office authorities' treatment of Mr. Naeem Khokhar, against whom no charges have been preferred, has been arbitrary and unjust in the extreme. The only reason that they gave for terminating his contract was what they called "loss of confidence". I believe that they are usurping the role of the courts in deciding a case without proper presentation of the evidence. What is worse, they are treating a man as guilty until he is proved innocent. They have not given him a fair hearing. They say that he can appeal, but that will take weeks. Meanwhile, he is likely to become destitute for want of money. The Post Office's attitude is contrary to all the rules of natural justice.

Ironically, a similar break-in took place at a nearby post office three weeks earlier, but the Post Office did not terminate that sub-postmaster's contract. No reason has been given for this inconsistent and discriminatory treatment. The Post Office failed to take into consideration the valuable service to the local community and the adverse effect on those who rely on the sub-post office, in particular pensioners and those on benefits.

I tackled the chairman of the Post Office as soon as the matter was brought to my attention and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge has done the same on behalf of his constituents. The chairman replied that in criminal courts a higher standard of proof—beyond reasonable doubt—applies, but that it does not apply to the Post Office's treatment of its sub-postmasters. He says that an employer is not obliged to await the outcome of a criminal prosecution. That may be good law, but the important words are "not obliged". Surely good employers would not prejudge a case without considering all the consequences.

What is more, in the case of Mr. Naeem Khokhar there is no criminal prosecution. He is not being charged with anything, yet he is being treated as a criminal by the Post Office on the way that it is conducting the case. Because there is no criminal charge against him, that is all the more reason why the Post Office should have refrained from taking hasty and arbitrary action.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I know nothing of the circumstances, save as they have been outlined by the hon. Gentleman. In relation to the person against whom no criminal charge has been laid, will he accept that I regard the account which he has given as monstrous and reflecting extremely badly upon the Post Office?

Sir Anthony Grant: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for saying that, because he is far more distinguished in the law than I am. I appreciate his support and his view.

The National Federation of Sub-postmasters has backed my constituent in the affair and wholly condemned the inconvenience caused to the public by the high-handed behaviour of the postal authorities.

I appreciate that Ministers must leave the day-to-day running of the Post Office to its managers, but I want Ministers to be aware that all is not well. My hon. Friend the Minister should be aware, too, that the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, of which I and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) are members, has prepared reports on the Post Office which include criticism of treatment by the Post Office of sub-postmasters, who are an important body in the community. I shall be urging the Select Committee to press the matter further. Matters are being made worse for sub-postmasters by the Post Office's policy of engaging supermarkets like the Co-op and others to undertake its work.

Sub-postmasters have an important role to play, especially in rural communities. I ask for two things—a better service for my frustrated constituents and justice for Mr. Naeem Khokhar.

10.22 pm

Sir Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Does the hon. Gentleman have the agreement of the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) and of the Minister to speak?

Sir Robert Rhodes James: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall be very brief. I have been very much involved in the case for several months, and I entirely support my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant). I know the case and the individuals. Obviously I cannot comment on the case, which is sub judice, although I have grave doubts about the way in which the matter has been handled. I resent the implication, through the closure of the post offices and the removal of the employment of my constituent and the constituent of my hon. Friend, that the presumption of innocence has been ignored. That strikes me as deeply serious and important.

I cannot comment on the justice or otherwise of the charge levelled against Mr. Khokhar, but I can comment upon the extreme inconvenience caused to my constituents and those of my hon. Friend, and the fact that our constituents have been deprived of their livelihood while the case is pending. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) described the action as outrageous. That is exactly the adjective that I would use.

10.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): My hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge (Sir R. Rhodes James) and for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) have raised an important issue. It would clearly not be in order for me to comment on the details of the case which they have described because of the sub judice rule. Moreover, it would not be right for the Government to interfere in what is essentially an operational matter for the Post Office. As I am sure my hon. Friends are aware, our role in Post Office matters is confined to general policy issues and to overall financial control.

I shall, of course, draw the remarks of my hon. Friends to the attention of the chairman of the Post Office. I am sure that he will notice the force with which they put their arguments, but I cannot, as a Minister, comment on the cases because of the sub judice rule.

I am, however, grateful to my hon. Friend for inviting the House to consider sub-postmasters. I know that he has done so because of the very high priority that he gives to the interests of his constituents. In this case, these constituents are, of course, not only the particular sub-postmasters involved. They are also those members of the public who have been customers of the St. Johns and Hills road post offices in Cambridge which are at present closed as a result of the dismissal of the sub-postmasters.

I am aware that Sir Bryan Nicholson, the chairman of the Post Office, has written to my hon. Friend assuring him that efforts are being made to minimise the inconvenience to his constituents as a result of the closure of the two Cambridge sub-post offices. I understand that the closures are only temporary, and that the offices will be reopened as soon as possible. It is in the Post Office's interests, as well as those of the local community, to get these offices reopened quickly. Might I urge my hon. Friend to encourage any of his constituents who may be interested in running a sub-post office to make their interest known to the Post Office without delay.

The Post Office as a whole provides a service on which we all rely. I hardly need say that this service must be delivered to the very highest standards. This is true in two important respects: the public's needs must be met in full, and these needs must be met by a service whose integrity is above question. These have been critically important requirements throughout the Post Office's life both as a Government Department and over the past 20 years as a public corporation. The Post Office's efforts to meet these standards go hand in hand with its drive to transform itself into a profitable organisation run in a commercial manner.

As I have said, the Post Office and its businesses seek to maintain a high standard of service. The contract conditions for sub-postmasters are designed to ensure that those occupying these responsible positions exercise their duties with the utmost integrity. It is, of course, a matter for the Post Office to set the type of contract conditions

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

under which it requires sub-postmasters to operate. The Government do not get involved in this process in any way. However, the National Federation of Sub-postmasters, which represents the interests of the sub-postmasters, negotiates contract terms with Post Office Counters Ltd.

There is no time tonight to go into many details about what is included in the contract. It is a lengthy document covering every aspect of business conducted at sub-post offices. However, I should like to highlight a few points. The contract is explicit on the responsibilities of sub-postmasters to ensure that post office assets in their charge are maintained securely, and to report loss, theft or fraud immediately on discovery. There is also a statement of the circumstances in which sub-postmasters may be suspended from office. These include instances in which investigations of irregularities are suspected or are in progress.

In such situations, the Post Office investigations division would carry out a careful appraisal of the matter. If there were to be a suspension or dismissal, it would take place only as a result of such an investigation. The Post Office is very aware of the need to protect individual sub-postmasters' livelihoods wherever possible. The Post Office is, however, equally mindful of its duty to protect the interests of the customer.

I should like to take this opportunity to say something generally about the Post Office's activities in crime prevention. The general public using post offices need to be assured that the Post Office takes crime and fraud prevention very seriously—as it must, in view of the type of business it undertakes. It is continuing to invest in resources to deter fraud and crime in its various businesses. In Post Office Counters, the emphasis has been twofold. New security equipment safeguards both customers and employees in post offices where large amounts of money are regularly handled—typically offices in large urban centres. In parallel, staff are trained in ways of identifying and preventing crime, particularly fraud.

I know that Post Office staff have on occasions displayed considerable personal courage in the course of their service to the public. I was greatly honoured to be asked to present bravery awards to a number of Post Office staff on 6 November last year. The majority of these were sub-postmaters or sub-office assistants. Without exception, all those honoured on that day demonstrated a great deal of personal courage, to which I wish to pay tribute.

To sum up, I have taken the opportunity to mention the Post Office's crime prevention activities and the entirely laudable way in which it recognises the bravery of individual staff because I want to make it clear that the public can be confident of two things. First, they can expect, when they go to a post office, to have their business conducted in a safe and secure manner.

Secondly, they can be sure that the Post Office values the contribution of its sub-postmasters—and, of course, of its sub-postmistresses as well—very highly. They are the backbone of the counters network—the figures that I quoted earlier speak for themselves. It is thanks to the sub-postmasters that a high standard of service is delivered to the public throughout the country.

It is unfortunate that the situation in Cambridge described by my hon. Friend has occurred, but, as I have said, I am confident that the Post Office is handling the matter with all due propriety, and with due regard both to the circumstances of the sub-postmasters involved, and to the interests of the public who use the two sub-post offices in Cambridge which have had to be temporarily closed.

I know that my hon. Friends take a different view. As I have already said, I shall certainly ensure that their views are conveyed to the chairman of the Post Office, who is, of course, in operational control.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 7 February 1992

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODIES

Mr. John MacGregor, supported by Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. A. J. Beith, Dr. John Cunningham, Sir Barney Hayhoe and Mr. Peter Shore, presented a Bill to establish corporate bodies to hold land and perform other functions for the benefit of the Houses of Parliament; to make provision for and in connection with the transfer of certain property rights and liabilities to those corporate bodies; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday 10 February, and to be printed. [Bill 69.]

Orders of the Day

Timeshare Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.35 am

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is the second time in four or five years that I have had the good fortune to come relatively high up in the ballot for private Members' Bills. As every hon. Member who enjoys such a position experiences, many suggestions are put to us. We have our own ideas, but on this occasion I did not take much persuading to settle for timeshare.

Like all hon. Members, over the years I have received a steady trickle of tales of distress, concern and anguish from constituents as a result of their experiences with the timeshare industry. It is not disputed that the ultimate solution to the problems surrounding timeshare lies within the European Community. The timeshare industry crosses national frontiers. An EC-wide solution is desirable and is very much on the cards. The assembly has produced a draft directive, the Commission has deliberated and the Council of Ministers is shortly to begin its consultation period. It will probably be two or even three years, however, before the European Community regulation is adopted by the Parliaments of the member states. It is desirable, therefore, that, at least for the time being, each member state should put its own house in order as much as it possibly can.

The purpose of the Bill is very simple. It is to require all sellers of timeshare within the United Kingdom, and in some circumstances sellers of timeshare outside the United Kingdom, to allow the buyer a minimum 14-day cooling-off period in which to change his mind. This is a development in consumer protection which, in my judgment, is long overdue.

Before I describe the detailed provisions of the Bill, it may help if I outline the background to it and describe in a little detail the mischief that it seeks to correct. May I make one point abundantly clear at the outset: the Bill is not an anti-timeshare measure. That is far from the case. I do not criticise timeshare as a product. I wish to put firmly on record my thanks to the Timeshare Council, its chairman, Mr. Tom Critchley, and its legal adviser, Mr. Colin Jenkins, for their immense help to me in preparing for this Second Reading debate. I fear that I have tried their patience and taxed their tolerance, but I am most grateful to them for their encouragement and help.

Timeshare is a perfectly respectable arrangement. The way that timeshare sales around the world have rocketed since the invention of the concept in the 1960s and 1970s bears witness to its popularity. It is a logical progression from the package holidays that became so popular at that time. Without any doubt, timeshare has brought happiness to many individuals and families. Many thousands of people are perfectly happy with their timeshare properties. But others are not, and the Bill seeks to address the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Some timeshare owners wish that they had never bought timeshare and at the time of doing so certainly were not properly aware of what they were doing. I have not found it easy to obtain definitive statistics on the size

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

of the United Kingdom's timeshare industry. The best advice that I have obtained suggests that about a quarter of a million people have become timeshare owners in the past four or five years, and the approximate rate of timeshare purchase is between 20,000 and 30,000 a year. Approximately 10,000 a year are sold in the United Kingdom under United Kingdom law.

I am sure that all hon. Members will have received at least one circular to tell us that we have won some mouth-watering prize—a car or a holiday in Florida—and that all we have to do is to attend a friendly holiday presentation. By a strange coincidence, I received such a card only two days ago. It makes interesting reading. It is addressed to my wife and me at our home address and it congratulates me on having been selected to receive two major awards. Apparently, I have come through to the third and final stage—that is the first that I knew of it—and I must win one of the two awards below: a Ford Fiesta, a laser personal computer, free holiday accommodation or even £1,000.

That side makes attractive reading. The smaller print on the back is worth looking at. It informs me that the company failed to contact me by telephone this week—that is not surprising as my number is ex-directory—and congratulates me on having been selected as a major award winner and tells me to telephone a number, which I have done and parliamentary constituency duties permitting, next week I shall attend this presentation. I am assured that no purchase is necessary. All I have to do is to sit through a two-hour presentation at "our holiday exhibition centre."

I shall go with eyes wide open and a cynical mind to see what happens, but many people are taken in by the glamour and the promises of prizes offered to them. Anyone who is optimistic or naive enough to succumb to that invitation—evidence shows that a surprising number do—is likely to be subjected to many hours of high-pressure sales techniques, sometimes, I am told, for up to seven hours, during which time every trick in the book will be used to persuade people to sign a contract. A number of people sign, only to regret doing so the moment they are free from the hard-sell atmosphere of that so-called presentation. By then, all too often, it is too late. They may have been assured at the presentation that the contract includes a cooling-off period, only to find that it does not. At best, they may be released from the contract only if they agree to sacrifice the deposit that undoubtedly will have been demanded from them. At worst, they may be locked into a contract that they do not want and cannot afford. Needless to say, the free gifts that lure people to the presentation often turn out to be considerably less valuable than they were made to appear and are subject to such conditions that they are not worth having. That is the heart of the problem.

No fewer than 10,000 complaints a year about timeshare have been made to local trading standards departments. That remarkably high figure is the equivalent of one for each contract signed, which is not the same as saying that everyone who signs a contract complains, because many of the complaints will have been made by people who attended presentations and left angry and bitter. Of that total of 10,000, about a third related to the absence of a cooling-off period. All the evidence suggests, therefore, that a substantial proportion of United Kingdom purchasers of timeshare regret their purchase.

It may be argued that such people have only themselves to blame. If they are foolish or greedy enough to be taken in by obviously bogus offers of valuable prizes and too weak-willed to resist sales pressure, why, it may be asked, should the law step in to help them? The argument runs that people must be prepared to take the consequences of their actions and that it is not the province of the law to save them from themselves.

Caveat emptor is a sound principle. As a general proposition, I have much sympathy with that line of argument, but in the context of timeshare it is wrong. In too many cases the behaviour of timeshare companies has been unethical almost to the point of being fraudulent. That is not a situation to which the law can or should remain indifferent. There is no equality of bargaining power between the gullible who are ensnared by timeshare advertising and the sophisticated techniques and sales methods employed by timeshare companies. The simple proposition underpinning the Bill is that if the unscrupulous take advantage of the vulnerable, the law should step in.

The principle of a cooling-off period is well established. It features in three specific areas of consumer protection—doorstep selling, life insurance and consumer credit. There is, therefore, nothing new in the principle of what is proposed in the Bill.

In concept, the Bill is simple. Basically, it contains one provision—a 14-day cooling-off period—for timeshare contracts and timeshare credit contracts. Although it is simple in concept, the Bill is lengthy. It contains 13 clauses and a schedule and seems to have grown almost week by week recently. There are a number of reasons for its being relatively lengthy. First, it is necessary to make its provisions watertight against evasion by the unscrupulous. Let us not be in any doubt that the Bill deals with some very unscrupulous people. Secondly, it is necessary to include provision for enforcement, which inevitably is lengthy because if one is creating a criminal offence one must spell out precisely what it is and what defences are available against it. Thirdly, many timeshare agreements are accompanied by credit agreements to finance them—credit that may be advanced by finance houses with close links with the timeshare company. It would be of little help to the disillusioned purchaser if he were able to cancel his timeshare agreement only to find that he could not cancel the associated financial agreement. Provision for cancelling associated finance agreements, therefore, must also be made and is to be found in the Bill.

Clause 1 consists of definitions. It defines the contracts to which the Bill would apply. Hon. Members may like to note that it would apply to any contract governed by United Kingdom law, whether or not it was made in the United Kingdom or abroad, and also to any contract where one of the parties was located in the United Kingdom, whether or not the law of the contract was that of the United Kingdom. The latter point is perhaps more important than it may seem at first because many timeshare contracts specify that they are to be governed by non-United Kingdom law—the Isle of Man law in particular and, to a slightly lesser extent, that of the Channel Islands. Timeshare companies will not be able to use that as a device to get around the provisions.

It has been suggested that the Bill should go further and should specify that, even if neither of the parties to a timeshare contract is located in the United Kingdom and the contract is not made under United Kingdom law, United Kingdom courts should nevertheless not enforce such a contract unless it contains a cooling-off period. I understand that point and the Bill provides two main ideas for debate. The first involves the length of the cooling-off period and the second involves the question of jurisdiction.

Hon. Members may wish to raise the question of jurisdiction and I am sure that if the Bill reaches its Committee stage we shall return to it. I stress that I have an open mind on that question. I understand those who seek the widest possible jurisdiction, but attempts to widen the Bill's jurisdiction raise a number of jurisdictional difficulties. I am prepared to consider suggestions, but I am advised to say now that it may not be possible for the Bill to deal with extra-United Kingdom contracts which have been entered into.

Clause 1 also defines what is meant by timeshare, be it timeshare accommodation, timeshare rights, a timeshare agreement or a timeshare credit arrangement. It is of course a complex and technical part of the Bill and is intended to ensure that the Bill does not inadvertently catch transactions such as leases, student lets or repeat holiday bookings which are not timeshares. I was especially mindful of the dangers of ensnaring student lets, hence the stress in the Bill of a period of not less than three years which should eliminate that difficulty.

Clauses 2 and 3 are the meat of the Bill. Clause 2 lays an obligation on anyone who sells timeshare by way of business—the offerer in the language of the Bill. He or she must give the purchaser—the offeree—notice of his right to cancel the agreement before the agreement is made. Clause 2 also makes it a criminal offence not to do so. The cooling-off period must be specified in the notice. It must be at least 14 days from the day the agreement is made.

Clause 3 parallels clause 2. It contains provisions for timeshare credit agreements with one important difference. Failure to provide notice of cancellation rights in this case will not be a criminal offence. The main reason for that difference in treatment is that no criminal offence is created under the cooling-off provisions of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. Therefore, it would be hard to justify adopting a stricter approach for the purchasers of timeshares alone.

It is fair to say that the need for a cooling-off period is now widely and generally acknowledged. The debate is about how long that period should be. The greater the reluctance to acknowledge the need for a cooling-off period, the shorter the period advocated. I certainly understand why some of the most reputable sellers of timeshare argue powerfully that a seven-day period would be adequate. Conversely, in the debate within the European Community some people have championed an upper end of 28 days and some favoured 21. The draft directive has both—a 14-day cooling-off period for "home" contracts and a 28-day period for "away" contracts.

I have not arbitrarily plumped for 14 days. The basis of that decision was a desire to follow the length of time recommended by the Director General of Fair Trading in his 1990 report on timeshare and 14 days is now consistent with EC thinking. No doubt the debate will be continued in Committee. I believe that the onus of proof lies with those who believe that the Director General of Fair Trading's recommendation is wrong, but I have an open mind.

Clause 4 contains certain supplementary provisions to clauses 2 and 3. The offeree has no cancellation rights if he is acting in the course of business. A blank notice of cancellation must accompany a notice of cancellation rights. That notice must be in such form as may be prescribed. Agreements are not invalidated by contravention of clauses 2 and [illegible] The latter provision is to enable the purchaser to continue to enforce the agreement if he wishes to do so. It does not, of course, affect his cancellation rights.

Clauses 5 and 6 make provision for the purchaser's right to cancel a timeshare agreement or timeshare finance agreement respectively. The basic right is contained in subsection (1) of both clauses. The intention—the policy objective, as it were—of clause 5 is to ensure that all timeshare buyers have a right to a 14-day cooling-off period and that not being aware of that right should not deprive the consumer of the ability to exercise it. Thus, under subsections (2) and (3) a timeshare purchaser may cancel the agreement at any time if he was not informed of his right to cancel when the agreement was made unless he affirmed it and demonstrated in some way after 14 days had elapsed from the date of the agreement that he was happy with it and intended to stand by it. That basic right is contained in subsection (1) of both clauses.

Subsection (2) extends the right of cancellation indefinitely if the purchaser has not been notified of his rights, but that is subject to subsection (3) which states that if the purchaser affirms the agreement after 14 days he loses his cancellation rights even if he has been notified of them. What constitutes affirmation would, in the last resort, be for the courts to decide, but, basically it means that the purchaser loses his right to cancel if by a positive action he has made it perfectly clear that he is happy with the agreement.

The two clauses are similarly worded up to and including subsection (4) of each of them and then they diverge. For technical and legal reasons, there is no equivalent of clause 5(5) in clause 6. The remainder of each clause makes provision for what happens after the agreement is cancelled. Basically, the purchaser is entitled to the return of any deposit or other moneys that he may have paid, but in the case of a contract agreement the position is complicated by the fact that three parties may be involved—the timeshare company, the finance company and the purchaser.

The consequences of cancellation are, therefore, set out in more detail in clause 7. Except for necessary changes of wording, clause 7 is identical to subsections (1) to (3) of section 71 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. Clause 7(1) spells out the consequences of the exercise of cancellation rights under that Act. It is therefore clearly important that the provisions of the Bill should march in parallel with the broader legislation on consumer agreements.

Clause 7(1) ensures that the Bill covers the situation in which a credit agreement is part of a timeshare agreement and the situation in which such an agreement is free standing. Subsection (2) relieves the purchaser of any liability for interest if he repays the credit promptly. Subsection (3) relieves the offeree of his liability to repay the credit unless the offerer or creditor makes a request in writing.

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

The rest of the Bill contains standard and technical provisions. Clauses 8 to 11 are standard provisions regarding enforcement and are drawn more or less word for word from the Property Misdescriptions Act 1991. Clause 8 allows timeshare sellers a due diligence offence in the event of failure to provide the purchaser with a cooling-off notice and places certain conditions on the defendant if he wishes to claim that his omission was due to false information or the fault of another.

Clause 9 makes it possible to prosecute employees of timeshare companies in appropriate circumstances, and renders directors and managers of bodies corporate or members of partnerships in Scotland liable if an offence is committed.

Clause 10 draws up the enforcement schedule, clause 11 lays down time limits for prosecutions, and clause 12 contains a number of general provisions which are grouped together for convenience. Subsection (1) makes it clear that a cancellation notice does not have to be in a prescribed form to be effective. Subsections (2) and (5) are designed to ensure compatibility with the Consumer Credit Act 1974. Subsection (3) allows for notices of cancellation getting lost in the post, or for timeshare companies claiming that they have been. Subsection (4) is important as it ensures that the purchaser cannot sign away his right to cancel. Subsection (6) contains certain necessary definitions, and subsections (7) and (8) contain the necessary order-making powers. Clause 13 contains the short title and provides for entry into force and application in Northern Ireland.

The enforcement schedule contains standard provisions laying a duty of enforcement on local authority trading standards departments and on the Department of Economic Development in Northern Ireland. It also gives powers regarding the production and seizure of documents and of information stored in computers. It would be an offence to obstruct enforcement. There are the usual provisions regarding confidentiality and self-incrimination.

The Bill is targeted at a specific mischief which has gone too long unchecked. It is not intended to deal with all the problems that have arisen from the growth of the timeshare industry: that is beyond the scope of a private Member's Bill. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will touch on that point when he speaks later. However, the Bill will do much to stop the exploitation of vulnerable people.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Bill applies not only to those who sell a timeshare in the first instance, but to those who own a timeshare and who then wish to sell it on?

Mr. Hunter: I believe that such an application would move beyond the immediate specifications of the Bill. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point and it may be possible for my hon. Friend the Minister to comment on it.

Mr. Norman Miscampbell (Blackpool, North): I give an example on that very point. Under the Consumer Credit Act 1974, one buys a product and there is a cooling-off period. That is one thing. If one then wants to resell that product privately, that is a quite different thing. If the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) was included in the Bill, many of us would find it difficult to support it.

Mr. Hunter: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for that contribution. He is far more expert on these matters than many of us are.

I stress that the Bill will, I hope, do much to stop the exploitation of vulnerable people by organisations whose sales methods have reached a level of unscrupulousness which renders them a proper target for the criminal law. It is time for Parliament to call a halt to these practices. I therefore ask the House to give the Bill a Second Reading.

10.4 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I fully support the Bill and I congratulate the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on introducing it. As he outlined, there are timeshare companies that operate in this country and overseas which have brought great pleasure and happiness to many people. In our day-to-day involvement in our constituencies we all meet people who have such timeshares. One chats to people who say that they are going to their timeshare, perhaps in Europe. Such people enjoy their timeshares and wish to keep them. I am sure that no hon. Member wishes to restrict such companies. We often say in debates in the House, "If only all companies acted like the well-run companies do, there would be no need for legislation." As the hon. Member for Basingstoke has pointed out, that is sadly not the case.

From time to time cases come to our attention. I am sure that all of us sometimes try to think what our attitude would be if we were in the position of a constituent who comes to our advice service and says, "I am in hellish trouble. What do I now do?" In our everyday life, we think about something and we may enter a contract. One gets home and starts to think about it. One thinks, "Is it really a wise thing to do?"

What concerns me so much about many timeshare companies is that a person may in all sincerity enter an agreement. He may go home and, away from the heavy-handed pressure, sit down with his family and think, "Am I wise to carry on with this? No, before I get into deep financial trouble, I will cancel." When he seeks to cancel, even in a matter of days, he starts to realise just what the problems are.

A constituent came to see me and explained in detail that he had entered a timeshare with a company operating in the Isle of Man on 13 April. He wrote to the company on 17 April to say that, having sat down and thought matters through, he felt that he must cancel. He said that if the company was involved in expenses because he had cancelled, he fully realised that he might be liable to pay some of the expense.

On 20 April, the company concerned wrote back and said:

> "We are in receipt of your letter dated 17 April 1991 and comment as follows. You have signed a legally binding agreement from which neither yourselves nor the company can withdraw. It is clearly stated in the disclosure statement duly signed by yourself. Therefore, we expect your balance prior to 13 April to be paid as quickly as possible."

One can well understand a person's worry when he receives such a letter. One thinks, "What is going to happen to me?" I am sure that all of us have often heard people wonder what their chances would be against a big company which has good legal advice available to it.

People think of the possible court action and financial involvement and decide to continue with the contract, however difficult that may be.

Companies that apply pressure tactics ought to think, "This person is putting us to some inconvenience and expense—and we shall certainly seek to get the expense that we have incurred back from him—but it is to his credit that he has told us at a very early stage that he has had second thoughts and cannot continue with the agreement."

It was after my constituent received that letter in April that I became involved in the case. I wrote to the company on 5 July last year:

> "Can I say to you I will await your reply, but if it is not a reply that accepts that Mr. and Mrs. Mathison no longer wish to pursue this Timeshare with your organisation, I will raise the matter on the floor of the British House of Commons and also circulate it to all the British Newspapers outlining the tactics that your Company follow."

We in the House have privileges and can raise on the Floor of the House any case in which we feel a constituent has been treated unfairly. In doing so, we are safeguarded against possible legal action by the company. Although we have that right—and rightly so—we can exercise it only if, as in the case of the gentleman to whom I referred, our constituents come to see us. There must be a lot of people who, for whatever reason, do not say to themselves, "I'll go and see my Member of Parliament and see what he can do." If people come and see us, we can not only write to the company but—let us not mince words here—place it under some kind of threat. We can say, "My constituent has rethought. He realises that you may have incurred some expense that he has an obligation to meet, but he is now asking to be released from the contract." But we all know what the final outcome can be if the company does not wish to release a person from the contract and if he does not see his Member of Parliament. That is why the Bill is so welcome.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke explained the clauses in detail. I realise that other hon. Members have a legal background and may rightly wish to refer to legal aspects of the Bill. I have dealt with other cases, but that to which I referred really annoyed me. My constituents had quickly said that they had had second thoughts, but that they would willingly pay any money that they owed, yet, within a day or two, the company adopted the heavy-handed tactic of threatening legal action if they did not keep to the contract that they had signed. Because of that, the provision in which I am most interested is that for a cooling-off period. I think that it would be fair to allow 21 days. If I were organising a timeshare company, I should certainly be prepared to allow people 21 days in which to have second thoughts. Like everything else, however, we can discuss that in Committee.

Timeshare organisations should welcome the Bill. Only the very dubious companies will raise any objections to it. I am sure that the Bill will receive widespread support not only in the House but throughout the country.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke referred to European Community legislation. We all know—whether we support the EC or not—that its procedures move very slowly. I am a member of our delegation to the Council of Europe, and have been for many years. The Council has not discussed this subject, but, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the Council of Europe is a much larger organisation than the EC, with more than 20 members, and it might help if the hon. Gentleman consulted the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe and asked whether one of the committees might discuss such action. I must say that I do not know offhand which committee would do that, but it might help to broaden the debate to other European countries with which we have close associations and so further the Bill's objectives.

Mr. Hunter: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that suggestion. I acknowledge that that possibility had not occurred to me, but it is certainly one which could properly be explored.

Mr. Cox: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I would certainly do all that I could to support such European action, as, I am sure, would other members of our delegation. It could also be pursued through the friendships that we build up with representatives of the other member states.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the Bill, which I am sure many people will wholeheartedly welcome. As always, there will be a certain amount of sadness, and people will wish that it had been in existence a year or two ago. Unfortunately, that is life. The Bill will be welcomed by good timeshare companies and will protect people from any bad companies which, whatever legislation is in place, will try to find avenues by which to exploit people. The hon. Gentleman is doing us a service in trying to protect those people and I hope that the Bill will proceed to Committee with Government support and will shortly become law.

10.17 am

Mr. Norman Miscampbell (Blackpool, North): I wish to make a short speech in enthusiastic support of my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and his Bill. Experience of the constituency problem that lies behind the Bill must be common to every hon. Member, but I am wearing a second hat and I want to make it plain that my opening remarks do not apply to particular constituency cases with which I am dealing at the moment.

Both my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke and the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) have made it clear that many, if not most, people who go in for timesharing are entirely satisfied. But there are areas that are certainly grey and, in some cases, I think, actually black. In many cases, there is no first prize. In others, people who go to a timeshare presentation find that what they get at the end is of negligible value and may almost be rubbish.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke will take the opportunity—even if he has other pressing engagements—to go to the presentation. If I were he I would send a copy of today's *Hansard* before me. That might help him to get a good prize and would certainly ensure that he was properly looked after. My hon. Friend might also like to ask one or two questions—I would certainly like to ask them—such as, "How many people did you write to saying that they had won the first prize?" The companies cannot say that they do not know; they must have records of that. How many times was each of those persons telephoned? The organisations must keep a record or how would they know whom they had telephoned? I strongly suspect that one could more readily get an answer from Kevin Maxwell about what happened to the pension fund than an answer to either of those two questions.

[Mr. Norman Miscampbell]

Before my hon. Friend leaves that meeting, he should tell the company that the next time that it is about to send him a happy card saying that he has won, it should telephone the House of Commons. That might mean that my hon. Friend will not lose the chance of £1,000 or a motor car.

I am also aware that, sadly, legal proceedings abroad can be extremely difficult. I shall not make invidious remarks about which countries are involved, but we all read the newspapers and know perfectly well that it is often extremely difficult to enforce contracts abroad. I would be the first to accept that complaints could be made about the British courts, but, my goodness, the delays in some continental courts are excessive.

Constituency problems relating to timeshare are common to us all. I need say no more than that my hon. Friend's Bill seeks to remedy a grave grievance. The old, pensioners and the inexperienced are often pressurised into taking out timeshares which all sides recognise that often they cannot afford. My hon. Friend's 14-day provision is splendid and necessary.

I put my concluding remarks to both Front Benches equally and do not seek to make party points, because I shall not be here after the next election. We all recognise the low chance of this Bill reaching the statute book—not because of its merits, but because of time. I very much hope that whichever party forms the next Government, it will not leave the introduction of such a Bill to a Back Bencher, but will take the chance to make sure that this Bill—or something similar—is put on the statute book as quckly as possible.

10.21 am

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on introducing his Bill. He said that he has been fortunate in the ballot twice in the past four or five years. If I am as lucky as that in the 30 or so years that I expect to be a Member of the House, I shall count myself very lucky.

We are familiar with the concept of timeshare. After all, this place runs on chunks of time—each chunk lasting up to five years. However, far from having any cooling-off period, we tend to have hotting-up periods.

The concept of timeshare is useful and has been around for some years. The idea is basically that people would like the use of a "property", in broadly defined terms, only at certain times, for a particular length of time and for certain purposes, but cannot afford to buy the whole thing all at once. One type of timeshare involves a holiday property in a different place or a different country.

There are also fishing timeshares which cause considerable concern in some areas, especially Scotland. Particular lengths of river are offered for sale on a timeshare basis. The times of year when the fishing can be expected to be particularly good are offered at a much higher price, with other times of the year being offered at a lower price. However, allegations have been made about certain types of behaviour in timeshare areas that do not reflect well on the owners. The allegations include intensive fishing for a season or two before the timeshares are offered for sale—the idea being that if a bad fishing record can be disguised as a good one, the timeshare can be sold for a much higher amount. The fishing methods used during those intensive periods are sometimes highly questionable. Moreover, local people sometimes find that they are denied rights that they and their families had been used to for perhaps several generations. It is almost traditional on some rivers for local people to be able to fish a river after the fishing proper has ended at 5.30 pm or 6 o'clock. However, they are often no longer permitted to do that on the beats where timeshares have been sold. I know that that causes a considerable feeling of grievance.

I suggest that my hon. Friend also considers business timeshares. Some people always come to this country at a particular time of year for business purposes. They might find it extremely useful to know for certain that they could have the use of a particular office in a certain part of London or elsewhere for a certain period.

Most people are rosy-eyed when buying a timeshare. They do not seem to realise that there is a sting in the tail, and that that sting is the management or service charge. Some people feel that having paid so much money for the timeshare itself, that is an end to their liability, but that is not the case. Places have to be run, managed, serviced and maintained—and that costs money. Sometimes people do not realise that they will be billed for the provision of those services from time to time—and that those bills can sometimes be very large and can come as an unpleasant surprise. People must realise that those charges will have to be paid.

It is not only those who buy the timeshares who sometimes feel that they are being stung by the management charges. Unscrupulous operators can use the pretext of the management charges to level inordinately high and extortionate service charges. The bills are often ill-defined, showing little or no detail. The demands are often rudely termed, with threats being made against those who own the timeshares.

Another type of timeshare shark will sell off as many timeshares as possible and then disappear, leaving the property to those who own the timeshares so that they will have to carry out the management themselves. That happens simply because the original offerer cannot be bothered to run the property himself.

I do not want to give the impression that all timeshare operators are sharks—far from it; they are not. However, it is unfortunate that sharks have entered the pool. Of course, there are sharks in every form of business or commercial endeavour, but this pool has rather a lot. They operate in very shady ways, dangling what appears to be enticing bait before the noses of those whom they wish to persuade to enter timeshare agreements. We have heard examples of that today. We have heard about people who have been told that they have won a wonderful first prize and that all they have to do is to collect it. When they arrive to collect it, the place may well be a tacky little den in a damp basement where they are subjected to hard-sell techniques. Once their signature is on the dotted line, they will have to conform to the contract and they then find that what they were told was a wonderful prize is just a mirage.

I raise the case of a constituent, Mr. Raymond Swingler, who recently wrote to me about a timeshare in which he is involved. With permission, I will go into the case in some detail because it illustrates a great deal of what has been said in the debate. He wrote:

"Dear Mr. Summerson,

I enclose, for your consideration a breakdown of events surrounding the forfeiture towards the end of last year of a timeshare week owned by me.

As at the time I was under the misapprehension I had paid my annual maintenance fee—the point upon which forfeiture was exercised—I was completely unaware of my loss of this £5000-odd week until I attempted to exchange it for another week with an international exchange company.

My attempts to remedy the matter and reclaim my week were to no avail. Accordingly, as the resort had failed completely to even alert me my maintenance fee was in arrear for some six months after the date of invoice, and then failed equally completely to contact me when it began exercising its forfeiture procedures, in spite of having access to my address, I find its procedures to be totally defective in dealing with other people's property.

I would welcome your assistance, as your constituent, and that of others, including the Office of Fair Trading, with concern over timeshare practices to help me recover, or be properly compensated for, the loss of my property."

The details are as follows:

"On 1 February 91 I was invoiced for an annual maintenance fee of £169·12.

In mid-December 91, while attempting to exchange my ownership of this particular week for another week I was advised by the exchange company I no longer owned the week in question. I checked"—

with the resort—

"to be told by its manager that in accordance with owners' club rules my week had been forfeited for non-payment of the maintenance fee and had reverted to the ownership of the club with no recompense due to me.

Certain I had paid the maintenance fee I checked my invoices to see the invoice marked 'paid'. The resort said it had no record of receiving payment. Further checking with my accountant confirmed that I had not paid the sum due.

When I pointed out to the resort I had never seen a copy of any club constitution giving members power to forfeit weeks, nor had I received any notification of non-payment, I was told that on the first count I should have received a copy of the club's constitution with my purchase, and on the second three reminders had been sent out, and none replied to.

I replied I had received none of these: indeed the resort's last communication received by me was notice of the AGM on 21 May. This was received via a one year forwarding arrangement with the Post Office following my change of address in the middle of 1990. For this purpose I used my Press Council address at Salisbury Square, London, later to become the Press Complaints Commission. The resort's response was that it was my responsibility to keep it informed of any change of address; mine was that it had this, a continuing facsimile number on my personal letterheaded paper. The resort admitted it had this number on file.

I told the resort that when I bought my week as a resale, no club constitution had come with the sale deed. Nor had I received any notification of non-payment of my maintenance fee.

The resort said its final reminder had been sent by recorded delivery, although it had no record on file of doing this. Finally I was sent the copies of correspondence warning me of the penalties of non-payment of maintenance fee—the first on 4 August, some six months after the invoice was sent, the second on 4 September telling me forfeiture would take place on 20 September unless payment was made. A final letter, sent on 2 October, confirmed this had been done.

Within weeks the owners' club committee had sold the timeshare week, although it would not tell me for how much, or to whom. That said, the buyer used it immediately to book with the exchange company.

My points are:

(1) As the resort is run by an owners' club with draconian forfeiture rules (uncompensated repossession) adequate steps should be taken with each new owner to ensure he or she is aware of the club rules;

(2) Six weeks to accomplish forfeiture with only two warning letters on a six month old invoice is improper;

(3) Steps taken to find me as the registered owner were woefully inadequate;

(4) My mail address was operative until 30 June 1991, my facsimile number remains operative today;

(5) That to tell me that matter was closed, the timeshare week sold without recompense as I had failed to comply with club rules, but that the matter would be reported to the owners' committee, was a woefully inadequate way to deal with my complaint.

(6) I have now lodged the outstanding maintenance fee with my solicitors. Now I want either my week returned to me, or compensation paid at the full retail price of the week taken from me, together with the additional £42 I had to pay the exchange company for my alternative week, and solicitors and general costs reimbursed."

I have gone into the case in considerable detail because it raises several points about exactly why the timeshare industry needs to be regulated.

I put those points to the resort in question and it replied:

"We would respectfully point out that"—

the resort

"has a constitution with which we expect all owners to abide.

In so far as Management Fees are concerned there is a forfeiture clause in the event of non-payment of the management charge on the due date and we would refer to paragraph 9.11 and 9.12.

Invoices were initially mailed in February 1991 and reminders were sent including two by recorded delivery, these were in fact returned marked gone away.

We did not receive any communication from Mr. Swingler and as a result the forfeiture took place.

We now understand that when Mr. Swingler purchased his timeshare from a third party, not direct from us, he did not receive a copy of the constitution from the seller.

We have now been informed that Mr. Swingler had changed his address. There is a clause in the constitution paragraph 14.7 which gives owners an obligation to notify the committee and the management company forthwith of any change in the permanent address.

Now that we are aware of the circumstances we have already advised Mr. Swingler and his solicitor that the matter will be discussed at the committee meeting on 13 February."

In view of that letter, I have decided not to name the particular resort at present. I hope that it will come to the right conclusion and that my constituent will be compensated for what has happened. As I have said, his case shows the need for regulation of the industry.

I have one or two suggestions. First, to obviate this sort of difficulty, a timeshare register should be set up, showing the lengths of term, all the various conditions that must be complied with and so on, so that when people buy a timeshare they can refer to it for all the details. Secondly, as I suggested in an intervention in my hon. Friend's speech, the Bill should include all timeshares offered for resale. Otherwise, not only will what happened to my constituent continue to happen, but unscrupulous operators—sharks—may well find a way round the Bill's provisions by selling timeshares to their nominees in compliance with the Bill and those nominees will be able to sell the rights without having to comply with the Bill's provisions.

I again congratulate my hon. Friend on his wise choice of Bill. This matter is of concern to us all. The case that I have raised is not by any means the only one of which I am aware. People need to be protected from those who indulge in hard-sell techniques. They need time to be able to talk things over with friends and family. They should have the right to decide whether they are doing the right thing. They should also have the opportunity to seek further details.

People outlay considerable sums of money on timeshares. They should have the right to possess and

[Mr. Hugo Summerson]

enjoy their property and it should be a considerable asset to them. It should be a source of enjoyment. It should not become something that causes distress, anxiety and worry.

10.40 am

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on introducing the Bill.

This problem has been kicking around for a long time and people have always said, "You really think someone would do something about this." The issue has been around a lot longer than the Government, though, even given the continuous term of office enjoyed by the Conservative Government, we are not yet into our first youth. I am sure that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) would agree that we have many more consecutive years of Conservative government to come.

It is difficult to identify precisely what one should do something about. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke had some difficulty when drafting the Bill, because it is extremely complex. Even the notes on clauses that I received are complex.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) made an interesting speech and brought to our attention a case which encapsulates one of the difficulties surrounding this issue. It is obvious that my hon. Friend's constituent has been robbed by a timeshare company, but that case is complicated and it would be difficult to deal with it, whatever the legislation.

While I was listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow, I asked myself why on earth people would want to buy a timeshare in the first place. I accept that many people enjoy their timeshares. However, whenever I have got an invitation to take up a timeshare and whenever I have examined company stands at various exhibitions, which extol the virtues of timeshare, I have come to the conclusion that it is jolly expensive and a rotten deal. It always seems to me that those timeshares are sold by people who would make me count the fingers on my hand after I had shaken hands with them.

If one has a few thousand pounds, or several thousand pounds, to spend on one's holiday accommodation, timeshare is by far the worst option. I am a member of the council of the Caravan Club and if anyone is thinking of spending a few thousand pounds they could do no better than to buy a caravan. They could then tow it to the place that they wanted to holiday at, because, unlike timeshares, one can go from one place to another. One is not stuck with the same boring place year after year.

I am perplexed as to why anyone would want to buy a timeshare, but I accept that some people enjoy it and find the arrangements advantageous. It would be interesting to know, however, whether the majority of people who have bought such timeshares enjoy them. If people admitted their innermost thoughts, I wonder whether they would say, "Well, I am stuck with it now, so I'll grin and bear it." Such is the great English, and Scottish, stoicism.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) revealed a lot about this problem when he said, "If I were running a timeshare company". One of the problems is that people such as the hon. Gentleman are most unlikely to run such a company. What makes some people go into that business? Is it a wish to provide wonderful holidays for people? Do they want to improve people's quality of life and to widen their experience? On balance, probably not. Are they the sort of people who run local charities or make big donations to local good causes? On balance, probably not. In general, I believe that those who run such companies—no doubt I shall receive many letters of complaint from those in the business—are from the grubbier end of the business community. I believe that they want to make a big buck and that they do not give a damn about the service they give.

Every week when we discuss private Member's Bills we receive many letters that explain what a particular Bill means. We have all had many letters about the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill, which we are to discuss next week, but then we always get a lot of letters about subjects relating to animals. Whatever the Bill, we always receive letters of serious intent from those involved in a business who believe that it could constrain their business by accident. Such people set out their objections in a logical manner. They explain why a certain Bill should not be passed or why, after further consideration, it should be amended.

I do not know about other hon. Members, but I have not received a single letter from anyone in the timeshare business to explain why they believe that the Bill is wrong. Do they all agree with it, or are they keeping their heads down? I suspect that the latter is the case. As they say, "If you are in a hole, you should stop digging." I suspect that those who run the timeshare companies have decided that, with a short parliamentary Session, they hope to goodness that the Bill does not reach the statute book. I believe that they have decided on a policy of, "Let's keep our names out of it, thank you very much."

I am sure that there are legitimate operators in the business, but it is beholden on them to contact hon. Members to explain their views on the Bill. Those legitimate operators and developers presumably have some ideas that could be included in the Bill to toughen it so that it has the desired effect. With their experience I am sure that we could make the Bill much better. People who work in an industry are able to tell us about its foibles. They can help us to make that industry work better, because they know who the crooks are and where the bodies are buried.

I was fascinated by what my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke said about the invitation to a presentation that he received from a timeshare company. My wife and I decided to go along to a presentation one evening, but she was heavily pregnant and had the baby on the day that we were due to go to the presentation.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): The hon. Gentleman got first prize.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, it was first prize—a magnificent baby.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke bravely went to such a presentation, but he is not the first hon. Member to do so. As hon. Members will be aware, I had the honour to be Parliamentary Private Secretary for two years to my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), the former Prime Minister. My right hon. Friend received such an invitation—the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South, who keeps up with such issues as shadow spokesman on consumer affairs, will remember this incident.

My right hon. Friend received a letter to say that he had won a new car. He thought that that was "jolly good" and "marvellous". He went along to claim it and a startled receptionist found—I was about to describe my right hon. Friend as curmudgeonly, but that would be a disgraceful description and I ask for that to be deleted from *Hansard* —a stoical former Prime Minister of this country demanding his Ford Fiesta.

"I have a letter saying that I have won a car. I want it. When shall I get it? I need not drive it away now, but I want to be sure that I shall get it," demanded my right hon. Friend. I do not know whether he ended up with the customary plastic imitation set of Florence Nightingale teeth.

I am no lawyer and I try not to be a barrack room lawyer, but when I read the documents I am almost convinced that a specific offer is being made. The letter says, "You have won a car" or a television set, a marvellous holiday or something else. But I do not know one person who has ever received such an article.

Perhaps the timeshare industry will provide us with the names and addresses of people who have won cars. Let us see the bills of sale for the purchase of the cars and other objects. Let us be told who got the television sets, video recorders and the rest. The whole thing is a complete scam and the timeshare industry knows it. It is about time people were made aware of what is going on.

The cooling-off period is the most important part of the Bill. Salesmen can be extremely persuasive. I can claim a bit of a record in the matter. Whenever I go to buy a car —indeed, when I buy virtually anything—the article always seems to be in short supply. "No guv, you won't get a discount on that. It's in very short supply just now," I am told. When I come to sell it I am then told, "Can't give you a lot for that. Nobody wants it now." I am a sucker when it comes to such matters. I never get a discount and I always seem to sell whatever it is for half of what it is worth.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): My hon. Friend should buy a Trabant.

Mr. Hughes: I do not have one, but I have always wanted a Trabant. I am told that they are very good cars.

When people come under heavy sales pressure, many of them will give way to it. Having been browbeaten or killed with cream—soft soaped for several hours—some people will sign documents and only later reflect, "What have I done?" So a cooling-off period is vital, and I was appalled by the case that was brought to our attention by the hon. Member for Tooting. The attitude of the sharks is incredible when they simply say, "You have signed this legal agreement. You are bound by it."

Many other areas of consumer protection revolve around a cooling-off period. I understand that it is impossible for a salesperson to come to one's door, make one sign an agreement and make it stick, without there being a cooling-off period. That is true of credit agreements and financial transactions, certainly those involving the banks.

Mr. Hunter: It applies equally to insurance.

Mr. Hughes: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for drawing that to my attention. I recall reading such details when filling in forms for loans to purchase articles. That being so, why should it not apply to timeshares? As we know that browbeating goes on, we must ensure that there is a cooling-off period.

I have made my views known about the quality of the product that the timeshare industry is offering, but I repeat what others have said about the measure not being an attack on the product. If it is good and people want it, they are entitled to buy it. I suppose that I am a Conservative rather than a socialist because I do not believe that I know better than people know what they want, and if people want to buy a timeshare product, it is a matter for them.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): That was a cheap shot.

Mr. Hughes: I am sorry if the Opposition Whip thinks I was making a cheap shot. It was not intended as such. What I said is accepted by many people as being the difference between the philosophies of the two parties. I have no right to say what people should or should not buy or what they will or will not enjoy. If people want to buy this—or any other product—let us protect those who go to examine it, some of whom get caught in the net.

Clause 11(1)(a) gives

> "the end of the period of three years beginning with the date of the commission of the offence"

as the cut-off point. But it goes on:

> "(b) the end of the period of one year beginning with the date of the discovery of the offence by the prosecutor, whichever is the earlier."

That is confusing, though I appreciate that it can be looked into in Committee. One year is not necessarily a long period in this context, and I suspect that it might have been too short a time scale in the case to which my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow referred.

I hope that clause 12 will operate as broadly as the wording indicates, particularly in relation to cancellation, when it says;

> "a notice of cancellation of an agreement is a notice (however expressed) showing that the offeree wishes unconditionally to cancel the agreement."

The important point about that provision is that the form of the notice will not affect its validity. I take that to mean that if one writes to the company in an unambiguous way stating, "I wish to cancel the agreement. I do not wish to be bound by it any longer," that will be sufficient to stop the process in its tracks.

Mr. Summerson: I may be anticipating what my hon. Friend is about to say, but if he examines clause 12(3) he will see that it says:

> "For the purposes of this Act, if the offeree sends a notice by post in a properly addressed and pre-paid letter the notice is to be treated as given at the time of posting."

While the object of that is to confer almost a privilege on the offeree, how is the offeree to prove that the letter was actually posted? The subsection should state that there must be proof of posting, remembering that such proof is easy to obtain.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. We need to say precisely what must be done to ensure that the agreement has been cancelled, and that action must be within the reach of an ordinary person. Hon. Members become used to reading quite complicated documents, but legal agreements can be extremely complicated. I have read some of them several times before understanding what they mean. Anyone who has filled out a claim for child benefit will know how immensely complicated the

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process is. I believe that I should not be criticising that. It is a wonderful form, possibly the best form I have ever seen. That is another change that I wish I could make to the *Official Report*.

If somebody knows what should be done and sends a letter saying, "I cancel the agreement", and there is proof of the letter having been sent, that person should be satisfied in his or her mind—more especially, everybody else should be satisfied—that any claim to the contrary would be thrown out by the courts. People must be sure that they are achieving what they intended and that the agreement exists no longer.

I hope that the Bill reaches the statute book, and I am sure that it will receive the support of the Opposition. I hope that we are able to enact the legislation in this necessarily short Session of Parliament. There may be legal complications or changes that the parliamentary draftsmen and officials in the Department of Trade and Industry wish to make. However, that should not take terribly long and I hope that within a short time, the Bill will be discussed in Committee, pass to the House of Lords, return here and be placed on the statute book before the general election, whenever that may be.

Mr. McAvoy: It is obvious.

Mr. Hughes: The Opposition Whip appears to know the date of the general election. He obviously has inside information. I know that the Prime Minister is friendly and willing to reveal his innermost thoughts, but I did not realise that he did so to the Opposition Whips Office.

Everyone who listens to or reads about the debate—I hope that many people will do so—should realise that any law that we pass cannot prevent a fool and his or her money from being parted. People should keep that fact in the forefront of their minds when thinking about purchasing a timeshare. Prospective purchasers are putting up a lot of their money, and other people want to deprive them of it—we have heard of such cases today.

The value of Friday debates such as this is that they are widely reported. We are discussing an important matter which is not normally reported on the front pages of newspapers or chosen as the lead item in television and radio bulletins. But it gains substantial coverage on radio and television, which is reflected in newspaper reports, when debated here. I hope that many people will hear or read about what has been said today and take note of the constituency cases that have been raised in the House. I want everyone outside the House to realise that the people involved in those cases could have been them. The people who have been mentioned in the House today are probably at least as intelligent as anybody else thinking of buying a timeshare; if those people were fooled and conned, anyone else could be.

I appeal to radio and television authorities, and newspapers to give wide coverage to what my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke has said and to the other constituency cases mentioned. When considering whether to take out a timeshare, people should make the worst possible assumptions about the sales people until they have conclusive evidence that it is unfair to do so. If they follow that advice, they will not be conned out of their money.

When the Bill becomes law, as I am sure it will, many thousands of people up and down the country will owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke for choosing to bring the legislation before the House.

11.2 am

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I should like to endorse the spirit behind the Bill, and particularly the provision for lengthening the cooling-off period in which people are allowed to withdraw from an agreement into which they have been pressured. I would be the last hon. Member to call for additional regulations in business, but the problem is that timeshare sales people sometimes place the most appalling and undue pressure on individuals, almost trapping them into a position from which they cannot escape without signing up for something that they do not really want and cannot really afford.

It is easy for my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and me to laugh off such offers as the one that I have in my hand. I do not know whether he was offered the same Ford Fiesta as me—mine appears to be worth £11,320. It is offered to me by a firm in Sheffield called Global Marketing, which operates out of a building called Reliance house—an unfortunate name for a company that is obviously unreliable as it applies such ridiculous pressure. It offers £1,000, two flights to Florida, and a 14 in remote control television; and if I reply within 72 hours, I will receive an extra gift that will not be made known to me until I turn upon the appointed day. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke has received the same offer.

Mr. Hunter: I am envious of my hon. Friend as her Ford Fiesta is worth £2,000 more than mine.

Mrs. Gorman: Mine is obviously an automatic.

I do not think that people should be forced into taking such action. I am concerned about the matter as I have an unfortunate constituency case involving Mr. and Mrs. King who went for a holiday in Spain, expecting to enjoy themselves on a pleasant spring holiday. However, they found themselves in miserable circumstances that completely ruined their holiday.

They told me that they went shopping one day to a shopping complex at Benalmedina where they were staying. Their way was barred by young people asking them to come and see a complex where flats were for sale. They were told not only that they would be offered a free coach ride to see the apartments, but that they and their children would be given the opportunity to spend the rest of the day at a water slide park. Such places are normally expensive for a family to visit, but the Kings were told that they would be able to enter free of charge. All they had to do was to take a short ride on a coach to the complex where they could look at the nice accommodation.

The Kings did not think that there was anything wrong in taking up the offer, especially as it was on the way to where they were going and it would be an outing. They thought that it would be something for nothing—everyone is tempted by getting something for nothing at some time in their lives. The Kings got on the coach and set off.

For the rest of the day the Kings faced pressure to try to force them to sign up for one of the apartments. They were taken into a reception area and shown a wall covered with excuses made by other people as a way of getting out of buying one of the flats. The Kings were treated to the services of a comedian, who poked fun at the excuses and lies people had used for not wanting one of the company's wonderful flats. It was suggested that anyone who did not take up the offer must be stupid, weak and silly, and did not know what they were missing. Everyone began laughing in an embarrassed way at the alleged stupidity of all those who had previously forgone the chance of getting a wonderful apartment.

The story is almost impossible to believe. The Kings were nice and ordinary people—a small family on holiday. They went to see the apartments, which they said were quite nice. They were told that all they had to do was to put up £400 and they could then have one of the apartments to use for one or two weeks of the year. The total purchase price was to be about £4,000, and all they had to do initially was to part with £400.

The Kings were made to feel that they should obviously be willing to part with that amount of money as they would have to be paupers if they were unable to do so. They were generally made to feel that if they could not afford such a price there must be something wrong with them, and they should be ashamed of themselves in front of the other people present who were out for a happy, jolly day with the intention of buying.

The Kings did not want to sign. The young man dealing with their case turned nasty. They were literally sitting in a corner of a room with a young man in front of them, poking his finger at them and demanding to know their salaries. He was saying that it was absurd to be on holiday in Spain if the Kings could not find £400 for something that would be wonderful for them for the rest of their lives.

The Kings said that they felt terrorised. It is difficult for us to believe that, but the Kings were in a block of buildings in a foreign country, and did not know exactly where they were. Their two small children were unhappy and were becoming more irritable as time passed. The family were being barked at by a young fellow who was clearly on commission and did not want to let them go. The Kings described their position as that of mice in a trap. A piece of cheese was being dangled in front of their noses; if they took the cheese they could get out, and there was a great temptation to sign up.

They were unable to get away from the place as they could not leave until the coach left, which was to be when everyone who had taken the trip was prepared to return.

When they asked for refreshments they were told that they could buy them elsewhere on the complex, and they turned out to be extremely expensive. By this time they felt as if they were almost in prison. The same young man came and found them while they were having something to eat in the restaurant. He chatted to them nicely and instead of giving them the third degree he became very friendly. They relaxed, he bought the children a Coke and suggested that he walk around with them. In fact, they said that they could not get rid of him—he was stuck to them like a fly to flypaper.

Eventually they said that they had not brought their cheque books or cash, but the man asked them whether they had credit cards: "Let's look in your pockets then." The people felt so intimidated that they finally signed a piece of paper saying that they would pay £400 as a deposit on the apartment.

They were relieved to be able to get on with their holiday, but when they returned to England they immediately tried to stop their cheque. Then their troubles began all over again. The company started writing threatening letters; I have one of them with me today, from a company called LSI, based apparently in Waltham Cross in Hertfordshire. The company wrote to threaten these people with legal action.

> "to recover the moneys contractually agreed under the above purchase agreement. We therefore inform you that unless a replacement deposit in the sum of £400 is received, or satisfactory arrangements made within the next 7 days . . . your file will be passed for action to our Legal Department."

So this simple couple who went on holiday to Spain have had their lives ruined. I have taken up their case and have written to the organisation, known as the Royal Oasis Club at La Quinta. I have also taken the trouble to unearth some other background material.

For instance, I have found a report produced by Lord Denning on a similar case in which he makes it clear that it is a principle of British law that there should not be unequal bargaining power between individuals which can be used to pressurise them into making a purchase that they do not want to make. The tactics used in my constituents' case bordered on the criminal. People have been forced to part with £400 to buy something that they did not want and could not afford, under terrifying pressure. Then they were threatened with being taken to court if they could not find the money.

Lord Denning says:

> "By virtue of it, the English law gives relief to one who, without independent advice, enters into a contract on terms which are very unfair or transfers property for a consideration which is grossly inadequate, when his bargaining power is grievously impaired by reason of"

the circumstances in which the bargain is made. So the law clearly offers protection to the likes of my constituents who found themselves in such unfortunate circumstances. I hope and trust that this Bill will reinforce Lord Denning's decision.

It is essential that there be adequate escape routes for such people. My constituents were faced with the prospect of paying for a solicitor to argue their case for them—that would mean paying out more money. This is wholly unacceptable to me—and I believe in the free market—and to the people in the industry who operate a fair and decent policy. I should like an assurance from the Minister that the Bill will increase the cooling-off period, as many people sign up while away from home and do not return to their homes to think about what they have done for several weeks thereafter.

When people are pressured they must be given a document that states clearly that they have more than the two weeks on the face of the Bill in which to change their minds. They should have a minimum of a month. And unless such conditions are met the Bill must penalise these unscrupulous people with a hefty fine. I hope that the Minister can thus reassure me so that I in turn can reassure my constituents that the Government are well aware of the plight of people in these circumstances and will take action to prevent it from recurring in future.

11.14 am

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) seems to be mellowing with her service in the House. I cannot believe that this is the hon. Lady who advised people to deal with ticket touts and pay them £70 for a Wimbledon ticket if

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that was the going rate. If legislation is introduced to provide for a cooling-off period for deals with tickets touts, I wonder whether she will support it.

Coming as I do from an engineering background, I know the importance of good salesmanship. Salesmen feel, however, that this country does not take them seriously. One reason for that is that unscrupulous salesmen bring the profession into disrepute. In America salesmen are highly regarded, and if we have to sell our products abroad we certainly need professional sales people with high ethics. Unfortunately, the people involved in timeshare often do not have high ethics.

The vast majority of people in this country are brought up to feel that it would be impolite to suggest that the person selling them something is involved in sharp practices, so bad salesmen play on people's good upbringing and high standards. They rely on the fact that potential buyers are polite and decent people.

I hope that as a result of our debate people will be more prepared to scratch the surface and find out what type of salesman is selling them timeshare or anything else. I congratulate the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and I am pleased that the legislation will tighten up on sharp practice.

I hope that one day we will legislate to control selling over the telephone. British Telecom is turning a blind eye to how our telephones are being used. Among other things, they are being used in the sale of timeshares. I received a call telling me to come along and pick up my prize of a gold watch, provided that my salary reached a certain level. When I turned up to pick up my prize it turned out that the company was using rented office accommodation in Glasgow—it did not even have a permanent address. And I am sure that I would not have been given a gold watch, just a lot of pressure.

British Telecom should realise that some of these high-pressure telephone salesmen contact homes in which there has been a bereavement or some other serious problem. They ring up such people and tell them that they have won a prize, or a chance of a holiday in Spain or, if they will only come and see a timeshare, they will be introduced to a lovely range of fitted kitchens. I have complained to British Telecom, but this activity represents business for it, so it does not want to act.

A constituent of mine was able to solve the problem of high-pressure salesmanship on the phone. She received a call to say that a salesman wanted to come and see her about a holiday in Spain. It was obviously to do with a timeshare. She said, "Certainly, come along at seven in the morning." Sure enough, the salesman turned up at seven in the morning and she said, "I'm glad you've called, because I want to tell you and your company that I want nothing to do with your high-pressure salesmanship." She got a mouthful of abuse, but she has never had a telephone call from that company again.

Timeshare organisations get names and addresses from computer disks that are sold by all sorts of companies. For example, when one is asked for a name and address for a survey in the street, that information sometimes goes on to disk and can be sold. That is particularly so when the surveys ask about salary scales. These sales people do not want to wast their time with someone who has been unemployed for a long time or is on social security. They want to target those with an income that can cope with timeshare.

Some companies deal entirely with selling names and addresses. There is another disturbing feature. A democratic society must have a voters roll and I understand that there is a sideline, although not a big one, for local authorities that sell information to commercial organisations from the voters roll. I hope that a local authority approached by such a timeshare organisation —obviously it will look for information on a ward in the stockbroker belt or a similarly affluent area—would reject such an approach. It is a pity that when information goes on to computer disks for genuine reasons, people run the risk of their names and addresses being handed over to these unscrupulous characters.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Basingstoke on doing something to prevent these malpractices, about which every hon. Gentleman has been concerned.

11.22 am

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): You will understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am not normally here on a Friday. Given the political scene in Scotland, which can only be described as interesting, I should rather be there. However, there is a Scottish Bill on the Order Paper, and I have remained for the debate on that.

The practices used in timeshare selling have caused considerable concern and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on introducing the Bill, because it is essential that the matter be dealt with. He will understand what I mean when I say that I feel that I have been down this road before. This is not the first attempt to deal with what has become an ever-increasing annoyance to many people. For some, it is more than an annoyance. They can and have been conned into imagining that if they visit a timeshare office, they will be given gifts and perhaps even end up wealthy because there is a magic pot of gold that will produce rewards for everyone just because the timeshare scheme exists.

I have been on the receiving end of this sort of literature. Like the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), I find that, as my name has appeared on lists showing that I am a Member of Parliament, people have thought that I have lots of cash to throw around. Such people have misunderstood the hon. Gentleman and me. We have never been noted for the fact that we want to throw around our cash unnecessarily or ostentatiously. He and I must have viewed these invitations with cynicism and scepticism. When these invitations first started arriving, my wife thought that there was something marvellous about them. One only had to go and see something and one was bound to win a Metro. I said, "Hold on a minute, the world is not full of people wanting to give away Metros. What's the snag?" We examined the invitations in some detail and discovered that things were not quite as they were presented. This is the kind of rapid con by which so many people have been fooled.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) said, under the law of this country, we expect equality between those selling and purchasing. Before coming to this place, I ran department stores and I know something about vending. One was always conscious that one had to present and advertise one's goods in a manner that would not mislead. One had to ensure that the sales staff did not state more than they could deliver or present something in a manner that suggested that one was less than honourable and honest in the way that one conducted one's business.

In the modern and relatively affluent society in which we live, one should not have to indulge in these practices to make a living. If someone is selling the right goods at the right price in the right place, there will be a market for them because people will buy what they want. However, some are not honest or honourable and the way that they conduct their business is highly suspect. People who do not have experience of looking at the fine print and understanding what is involved may find themselves talked into believing that here is a magic formula that will give them, free, a lovely place in the sun and a gift, or that one pays for this place with very small sums over a very long period. The reality is very different.

The Bill extends to Scotland because it is a United Kingdom measure. Scots law is different from that south of the border and one of the advantages that we enjoy is that contracts must be approved in a manner that produces corroboration. That is an important basic fundamental of Scots law. Despite the various sale of goods Acts and all the other legislative measures, there is a weakness in the system that must be looked at in detail. However, I understand the difficulties in phrasing the words in any Bill that attempts to deal effectively with this problem. I seem to have spent a lifetime serving on Committees examining Scottish Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bills. The House will be aware that my private Member's Bill, which reforms Scots law, has just completed its stages in this House and gone to the other place.

Often, once one gets an Act on to the statute book, particularly when it deals with these tricky matters, one has to go back to it afterwards. The legislation, as submitted, does not always deal with the problem that one set out to deal with in the first instance. I am not a lawyer; I am not competent to comment on the wording of the clauses. I recognise, however, that there are difficulties and I shall not be at all surprised if the Minister, who is a lawyer, tells us that certain aspects of the clauses are technically defective. That seems to be the lot of hon. Members who introduce similar legislation. Nevertheless, I think that my hon. Friend will accept that it is because of public concern about the activities of these unscrupulous people that we are faced with this problem.

It is not just a question of pressure selling. People understand high-powered pressure selling. I recollect my first experience of it when, as a young Royal Air Force officer, a chap came to my door who was convinced that he could sell the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" to me. He thought that every young RAF officer would want to understand everything in the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" because one day he hoped to become an air chief marshal. There were two things wrong with his reasoning. First, I had no aspirations to become an air chief marshal. All that I ever wanted to do was to fly. When an RAF officer achieves a certain rank he is not allowed to do that, so I had no intention of going beyond the point where I could fly.

The salesman's second mistake was that, in any case, I could not possibly pay for the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" on the very poor wages that I received at that time. I should point out that that was during the period of a Labour Government. *[Interruption.]* I speak with experience, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have vivid memories of how badly we were paid. I could not have afforded the monthly payments out of my meagre salary.

Once the salesman had got his foot in the door, however, he tried to convince me and my wife that what we really wanted was the beautiful bookcase that went with the books. That is partly what this is all about: the alleged, hidden unreal benefits that one is supposed to enjoy if one invests in such activities. In the real world, however, one gets what one pays for. If anything that seems to be a good bargain is on offer, one might well ask why queues have not formed all the way round the building. We have seen evidence at sales of things being given away. People often camp out in front of department stores because the bargains that are on offer to the first purchasers are real bargains. The objective is to get people into the store so that the sale is a success. The atmosphere of a sale makes people purchase goods.

When people dream up these great timeshare offers, I wonder whether they have done a service to the rest of the service sector. They expose the fraudulence of their activities. The more we talk about it and the more we look at it the more the public—I have great confidence in the public—will realise that they cannot get such bargains. That is one of the great advantages of talking about timeshare in the House. The Bill provides us with the opportunity to put on record the weaknesses of the offers made by those who offer timeshares.

What is so sad about Friday debates is that they are seldom reported. The media are much more interested in our private lives than in what happens to the victims of timeshare organisations. The mind boggles at what the media might dream up if an hon. Member were thinking of going off to a timeshare somewhere with what my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) described as the birds that hang around Westminster. Only he could describe the other sex in that way. I shall leave my hon. and learned Friend to explain what he meant by that, because I am not quite sure. As far as I am aware, timeshare operators have not yet got round to suggesting that if we buy a timeshare it will give us the Valhalla that we can nip off to with the birds that hang around Westminster.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke and his supporters have done the House a service in introducing a Bill to deal with this dreadful practice. I hope that the publicity that is generated by debates of this kind will alert people to the dangers and that they will not fall victim to these ghastly practices.

11.35 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) for introducing the Bill. I am also very grateful to all those who have spoken in the debate: my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Miscampbell), the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). They all made the point that I intend to make both at the beginning of my remarks and at the

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

end: that anyone who is contemplating a timeshare holiday must think very carefully indeed before they go to a presentation. The Department of Trade and Industry has issued more than 1 million copies of "Your Place in the Sun." Later I shall refer to a few examples in the report of the Office of Fair Trading.

As has already been said, it is important to use the opportunity that this debate provides to publicise the high pressure sales techniques at these presentations. I hope that the debate will result in the Bill being given a Second Reading and that it will eventually become an Act of Parliament. The debate will also do a lot of good, in that it can bring home to people the importance of looking with extreme care at direct mail shots. I advise people to beware of going to these presentations.

The debate has thrown some interesting light on one of the shadier corners of United Kingdom commercial practice. It may help the House if I outline the Government's position on the Bill and say a little about the wider background to it. My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke graphically described the mischief that his Bill is intended to correct. I congratulate him on the clear way in which he has described the contents of the Bill which, despite its simplicity of purpose, is not without its complexities. They relate particularly to the importance of dealing with consumer credit. Many timeshare transactions are based on consumer credit.

I do not think that there is anything that I can usefully add to what my hon. Friend has said today, because he went through all the clauses. However, a number of hon. Members have raised wider issues in the context of the timeshare industry. Before I turn to the specific points that have been raised, I should like to deal with the wider context in order to set the scene.

Timeshare is a relatively recent phenomenon. The first timeshare resort in the United Kingdom was opened as recently as 1976, yet by 1990 there were more than 500,000 timeshare owners in Europe, of whom approximately two fifths were British. The European total is expected to have risen to one and a half million by the end of the century. Whatever problems there may be with timeshare, it seems clear that any industry that can expand at this rate is responding to a genuine consumer need. Indeed, timeshare has many thousands of satisfied customers all over the world. It is significant that of the letters written to the Director General of Fair Trading in response to his request for views for and against timeshare, about two thirds were broadly favourable.

But some customers are not satisfied and a few feel that they have been deceived and defrauded. The Department of Trade and Industry receives more complaints about timeshare than about any other industry. I know that one must be wary of government by reference to the size of ministerial post bags, but in this instance we were persuaded that a prima facie case for action had been made.

In July 1989, my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), accordingly asked the Director General of Fair Trading to carry out a review of timeshare problems and agreed on the following terms of reference: to consider complaints made by United Kingdom consumers about marketing and other problems relating to timeshare and to report on significant problems revealed by the complaints; in respect of those problems, to consider relevant statutory or voluntary controls which protect United Kingdom consumers and to assess their effectiveness; and, having regard to existing and proposed controls on timeshare, to recommend any further steps that may be necessary or desirable to safeguard the economic interests of United Kingdom consumers in respect of timeshare.

That was a tallish order for the director general, but he worked well and duly submitted his report. I am glad to have this opportunity to pay tribute to the care and thoroughness with which he discharged his task.

The report is a mine of valuable information. I hope that the House will forgive me if I use this opportunity to give a few examples from it. If members of the press are watching our proceedings, some of the examples are very telling and need to be relayed to a wider audience. It is instructive to quote an extract from a timeshare training manual. It reads:

> "You are about to begin a career in the most exciting industry to come along in the last 50 years . . . And you? You the reader are the lucky one. Why so lucky? Because you are in on the ground floor. If you work at it, you can become successful early in the history of timesharing and that success will lead you to more success. The industry of timesharing is so new that anyone with a year or two of successful experience can move rapidly into management, marketing or developing. And here you are (the reader) beginning the pages of this training manual at a time when all things are possible. If you are a good timeshare salesperson, meaning you know your business and you make the effort, you can make more than 1 million pounds in the next 15 years."

That is a fairly tempting enticement to anybody considering entering the industry, but, as I shall show later, one must use very persuasive tactics on one's unlucky customers to make anything like £1 million over 15 years.

Not all timeshare presentations are wrong. There is no harm in seeking to persuade somebody to buy a product. For instance, one person said:

> "No pressure was put on me to purchase the apartment when I visited the showroom. Naturally, the salesman knew his subject in detail and was able to answer all questions with ease and enthusiasm but this should be expected from any salesperson who is employed to sell a product. All the financial details were clearly presented at my interview and it was stated very clearly that a potential purchaser would be unwise to consider the purchase as a means of financial investment. It should be thought of as a holiday investment. This, I felt, was a very fair comment."

That is from a Mrs. C.

What could be fairer than that? That is the normal way of trying to sell an apartment and there could be no argument about that. However, as the report makes clear, other sales methods are very different indeed. At their worst, they seek to entrap people into attending a sales presentation by offering incentives that are made to seem to be the object of the visit and whose value to the recipient is conveyed in a misleading manner. Information given during the discussion is incomplete and deceptively presented. Sales persons are trained using a manual such as the one that I quoted a few moments ago, and they follow a set procedure which allows prospective purchasers little opportunity to respond except in a way pre-determined by the marketer.

The operation starts with direct mail. The sheer scale of it is quite extraordinary. One timeshare marketing company said that between April and August 1989 it had dispatched no fewer than 2,150,000 mail shots. The Direct Mail Services Standards Board told the Office of Fair

Trading that one of its recognised agencies estimated that it handled on average 100,000 items a week for timeshare clients, and the most prolific dispatched 30,000 a week. That shows the scale of the problem.

A typical example of what is included in a direct mail shot reads:

> "All we ask is that you and your partner spend approximately two hours of your time attending a sales presentation at . . . There you will discover the benefits of timeshare."

That makes it clear that the purpose of the mail shot is to sell timeshare, but most mail shots give the impression that their purpose is to invite the recipient to collect a free gift at a presentation. Typically, the envelope is marked, "Personal and Confidential" and contains a mail shot that says:

> "Your name has been personally selected. Do read this letter very carefully. It contains important instructions and information."

An impression of urgency is conveyed, but all these mail shots are sent by second-class post. Another example reads:

> "Previous notices remain unanswered. We must assume that you do not want to claim your award . . . This notice serves as your last opportunity to claim your gift before the expiry date shown above."

Often, the free gift is very enticing. We listened with much amusement to the alleged free gift of a Ford Fiesta to my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), but typically gifts are Vauxhall Astras or diamond chip watches.

Direct mail shots always try to convey the impression of urgency. I urge people following the debate not to be misled by sales talk about urgency; it is only sales talk. The object of direct mail shots is to make people think not only that the offer is genuine but that some awards have been made and that their chance of receiving one will vanish unless they act quickly. A recent mail shot about which the Office of Fair Trading received an unusually large number of letters and telephone calls referred to

> "a previous offer whereby you were to receive one of four items . . . We have completed our selection. Mr. and Mrs. Jones claimed their holiday for two and Mr. and Mrs. Smith claimed their cash."

There were many complaints because nobody believed in the mythical characters of Mr. and Mrs. Jones and Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Later amended versions awarded the holiday to Mr. and Mrs. Jenks to make it more realistic.

The findings of the omnibus survey show that marketers of timeshare, taken as a whole, make some attempt to concentrate mailings on middle-aged employed people. That point was made by the hon. Member for Springburn. That is a justifiable direct mail tool to try to market a product in a way that attracts people who might be interested in it, but often mail shots contain so-called details of eligibility and several young single people, thinking that they were going to receive a prize, where duped into attending a presentation and were told that they failed the so-called rules of eligibility, such as previous experience or income. I shall quote from such a person who was disappointed:

> "I had so called 'won' two airline tickets to Orlando . . . I was overjoyed at the thought of winning two tickets to Florida, as I've never been abroad before . . . There was a number to phone which I did, only to find out that you only got the two airline tickets if you signed an agreement for a timeshare flat in Florida. You can imagine how I felt, hurt and very, very disappointed."

Some people might say that that lady was gullible, but she had never been abroad and was sent a letter offering her a flight. In good faith she assumed that she would get one. She did not realise that to get to Orlando she had to buy a timeshare flat in Florida.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Mail shots are now becoming so widespread that organisations are running around looking for people to put on mailing lists. Surveys are being carried out in Sauchiehall street—the main street —in Glasgow and people who take part are being offered a chance to win a holiday in Orlando. They are being asked questions such as, "Do you have double glazing? Do you have central heating? Do you have a timeshare?" It is clear that the organisations are trying to build a picture of the people participating in the survey and they then sell that information to timeshare companies or to any other company involved in mail shots. Such organisations have been created to find people to put on mailing lists. So-called reputable organisations such as Readers Digest do not help matters because its technique is to write to people saying, "You had better hurry up. If you don't reply and take out a subscription next week you will lose your chance of winning a fortune or a free cruise around the world."

Mr. Leigh: I can only share the hon. Gentleman's sentiments. People should be very careful about direct mail shots, and I think that I have quoted enough from the report to show just how careful.

In addition to outlining a comprehensive set of recommendations for action, the director general summarised them as follows: the introduction of a requirement that before they sign a timeshare contract consumers should be provided with a written prospectus giving in clear and understandable language comprehensive information about the timeshare under a number of specified headings; a right to withdraw from the contract, without penalty, during a 14-day cooling-off period; a duty to ensure that advance payments for timeshare purchases are paid into an account maintained by an independent stakeholder of suitable standing or repute; the independent holding of title on behalf of owners; the protection of management fees and money received on resale or through rental; suitable amendments to the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 aimed in part at extending the Act to cover the contents of mail shots; long-stop powers for enforcement authorities to take action to prevent repetition of business practices which are misleading, deceptive or unconscionable.

In addition, and crucially, the director general recommended that, in view of the international nature of timeshare, it was desirable that other member states of the European Community and the EC Commission should consider similar measures to control abuses in the industry.

For the most part, the Government accepted these recommendations. In particular, we agree that there should be a requirement for a brochure and a cooling-off period and that there should be security for advance payments. We agree also that some amendment to the Trade Descriptions Act was desirable, and I shall return to that in a moment. We did not go along with the director general on protection of management fees or the independent holding of titles, as we felt on balance that this would be an unnecessary restriction on the commercial freedom of timeshare developers and was not justified by the indentified scale of the problem in these

[Mr. Leigh]

areas. The recommendation regarding long-stop power of enforcement went a good deal wider than timeshare, and raises interesting and important issues which must be the subject of a separate debate.

It is important to note that the director general's recommendations were not directed solely at Government. On the contrary, he felt—I am sure rightly—that there was a good deal the industry could do to set its own house in order. He made detailed recommendations covering such matters as improving compliance with the various self-regulatory mechanisms which relate to advertising, sales promotion and direct mail; improving rights available to owners and their associations; making organisations which provide services to the timeshare industry monitor more closely the way in which their connection to the resort is described; improving the management of resorts and the controls over management charges; and enhancing the prospects for lively rental and resale markets.

Of course, self-regulation, if it can be made to work, is often preferable to regulation by Government, and I am glad to say that the industry has responded positively to the director general's recommendations. Although the original Timeshare Developers Association disbanded in the autumn of 1990, it has been replaced by the Timeshare Council which has the advantage of a wider membership including all those involved in the industry—trustees, selling companies, exchange companies, management companies and timeshare owners, as well as the timeshare developers themselves. I personally welcomed the formation of the Timeshare Council when it was formally launched last April.

I attended the launch and am glad to pay tribute to its efforts to introduce a comprehensive code of self-regulation into the industry. Indeed, I understand that the Timeshare Council welcomes the Bill and has co-operated with my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke.

Let me revert to the Director General of Fair Trading's report. One point which stood out was the director general's reference to the European dimension to the problem. It seemed to us then, and still seems to us now, that, although the purely United Kingdom aspect of the problems connected with timeshare should not be ignored, to provide a comprehensive solution required legislation at Community level. It was for this reason that I announced last February that we would be asking the Commission to bring forward a directive which addressed the problems that had been identified by the director general. I am glad to be able to report that the Commission has taken a favourable view of our suggestion and has drafted a directive which it is currently knocking into shape before submitting it to the Council of Ministers. The directive will include a cooling-off period, and this might be thought to render the Bill we are now discussing redundant. However, I do not believe that it does so, for reasons to which I shall now turn.

The Government have been criticised for not legislating domestically to implement the recommendations of the director general's report. As I have made clear, we believe that for the greater part of these recommendations the way forward lies with an EC rather than with a purely United Kingdom solution, but this does not mean there are not specific United Kingdom problems which we cannot tackle directly. One such is, as the director general recommended, to amend the Trade Descriptions Act to make it easier to deal with misleading descriptions of services and, in particular, to bring so-called timeshare award schemes within the scope of the Act.

In fact, we believe that for the most part award schemes are within the scope of the Act, and it is encouraging that there have been some successful prosecutions under it. I hope that trading standards departments that have hitherto held back from taking action on timeshare will study these cases and will be encouraged to adopt a more proactive approach to the complaints that have been made. But there is one significant gap in our current powers in that the Act cannot be brought to bear on misleading indications of the likelihood that a person has won this or that "award". We propose to plug this gap as part of our general review of the Trade Descriptions Act which is now in progress, and will be introducing the necesary legislation as soon as parliamentary time is available.

The other area in which we can usefully take action domestically is the area which is the subject of the Bill before us: the introduction of a cooling-off period. I need not go into detail here, since the ground has already been thoroughly covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke. Suffice it to say that nearly half of those in a survey conducted by the Office of Fair Trading who had attended timeshare presentations felt they had been put under pressure to buy, and the number of complaints received by trading standards departments suggests that a significant proportion of timeshare purchasers have cause to regret their purchase. There is also a wealth of anecdotal evidence of distress caused by hard-sell methods to which I referred, of which the cases that have come to me personally repressent only a tiny fraction.

It is perhaps somewhat idle to speculate why it should be timeshare rather than any other industry that is disfigured by sales tactics which lead to such results. The fact remains that a substantial minority of sellers of timeshare have used sales methods which by any standards are unethical and unacceptable, and threaten to bring the whole industry into disrepute. In these circumstances, it is right that Parliament should step in to call a halt. This, I believe, the Bill will do, and for this reason the Government are offering their full support. If in the fullness of time we have an EC directive which extends the cooling-off period to the other member states of the Community, so much the better.

At best, it will be some little time before such a directive can be agreed and implemented in the law of other member states. The mischief that the Bill addresses is with us here and now. The Government therefore welcome the Bill and we are aiding my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke in every way that we can. We very much hope that the Bill will become law and that the public will take to heart the warnings given to them this morning.

11.59 am

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): We very much welcome the Bill and I pay tribute to the efforts of the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) in introducing it and in pursuing a matter which has been a source of grievance to the public since timeshare began in this country in 1976.

The sad fact is that it has taken a Back-Bench Member to introduce the Bill after years of Government inaction on the matter. The Minister condemned himself out of his own mouth today by cataloguing abuses in the timeshare industry, many of them, dating from 1989 to 1990, outlined in the June 1990 publication from the Office of Fair Trading. As can be seen from the illustrations given by many hon. Members today, many of the complaints have not been addressed and are being repeated.

We know what the Minister and his predecessors have done to help people who have suffered from timeshare abuse. They have issued a string of press releases not only this year or last year, but for several years. In 1988, the then Minister, the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), produced a press release which said:

> "half-price timeshares, discounts and prizes may be nothing more than a sales ploy."

The hon. Gentleman's reaction was to do nothing legislatively, but to make a leaflet entitled "Your Place in the Sun" available to the public.

A year later, when several thousand more complaints had been received, at the rate then, as now, of about 10,000 a year, a number of Conservative Back Benchers told the Government that their constituents were being duped and swindled by unscrupulous timeshare developers. The then Minister, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), put out another Department of Trade and Industry press notice in June 1989. It said:

> "Consumer Minister acts to curb dubious promotions."

The hon. Gentleman had to face Back-Bench criticism when he did not produce legislation that would have enabled people to have their grievances properly addressed. Instead, he wanted the Office of Fair Trading to consider what could be done to curb dubious timeshare promotions.

A year later, the Office of Fair Trading produced its report and the same Minister welcomed it. That was more than a decade after the complaints had first been raised in the massive volume about which we have heard today. The then Minister said of the director-general's report:

> "I shall now be looking very carefully at his recommendations and hope to give my response as soon as possible . . . The DTI's leaflet 'Your Place in the Sun' also offers . . . practical advice to prospective buyers."

Thousands more complaints were brought forward and a year later, the present Minister was in his post. He conceded that United Kingdom measures would be necessary at that stage, which is a very different tale from the one we have heard today when the Minister has said that Europe should be taking action on the matter. In praising the work of the Timeshare Council as he has done today, the Minister said:

> "The Council plan to develop a code of practice . . . This is very much a step in the right direction. But these efforts need to be backed up by legislative measures".

We are entitled to ask the Minister where those legislative measures are. They were hinted at and promised four years ago, three years ago, two years ago and last year. The Minister has condemned himself by his own inaction. Even as recently as 4 December 1991, another Department press release was put out. The Minister concedes:

> "I get far too many complaints about the high pressure sales techniques used to sell timeshare. People are frequently lured into 'presentations' by the promise of free gifts which do not materialise and find themselves subjected to several hours of highly pressurised selling. Many are persuaded to sign contracts they afterwards regret".

That was said by the Minister who has done nothing, although he knows from complaints from his own constituents that something must be done.

The number of examples of abuses in the industry is legion. One document was sent to me at my London residence. On the back, it raises a point mentioned by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) about the way in which credit card transactions are encouraged. It is put very subtly here. The document says:

> "Award conditions. Identification must be by Bankers or Credit Card or UK Drivers Licence."

There is an immediate stipulation that people must bring their credit card or, failing that, their driving licences. They can then be signed up to the scheme and pay by credit card. The prizes offered to me were a Ford Escort, a £1,000 holiday bonus, a hi-fi system, £300 in cash or a portable colour television. They are remarkably similar to those mentioned in a leaflet handed to me by a Conservative Member after it had been sent to one of his constituents. It mentioned the car first, then the holiday accommodation, the hi-fi, a video camera accessory outfit and the television.

The first example was a leaflet from Leisure Club International. The leaflet does not say where the company is based, but it says that the presentation is in Surrey. The second leaflet came from a company operating at the HOE Award Centre at 48 Leicester square. My third example is a leaflet from Whitesands Despatch at 10 Great Marlborough street, London. It offers four of the prizes that we have mentioned and then says clearly to the recipient:

> "Our records confirm that nobody is ahead of you for the car"—

except, perhaps, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). The company is pretending—the only word to use, although there may be worse—that the resident in London will, by turning up, get the car, because there is no one ahead of her, or £1,000 in cash, a holiday for two in Disneyworld or a cellular pocket telephone. All hon. Members know that the chance of the prizes being awarded, even though one is advised in the letter that one is almost certain to get a prize, is non-existent.

There have been many complaints which are well known to the Minister and to the Government. That makes the Minister's failure to act even more inexplicable. A front-page editorial in a publication from the Advertising Standards Authority says:

> "Dark corner of the industry . . . Why . . . is there so much resentment against timeshare operators?
>
> Timeshare mailshots as we have repeatedly had to point out on this page tend to be less than frank. Typically, they are coy about the product they are actually trying to sell at the end of the day—some merely invite recipients to come along to an exhibition or presentation with the offer of apparently lavish free gifts. Typically they are also less than completely frank about how the gifts are awarded or how they are valued."

The Advertising Standards Authority catalogues the complaints of abuses which it has received, at a peak rate last year of 25 a month. Club Riviera, based in Deansgate, Manchester misleadingly advertised its timeshare development, referring to a sea view which was in fact obscured by neighbouring high-rise apartments and to a sports complex and swimming pool which we understand had had to be abandoned. Complaints came from both Spain and Yorkshire and were upheld. The Minister did nothing.

I shall have a little more to say later about the Holiday Ownership Exchange at 361 Barking road, London. The

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Advertising Standards Authority had drawn to its attention three cases of mailings appearing to suggest that recipients had been awarded a car. That complaint, against a company which has offended repeatedly, was also upheld. The complaints came from Hampshire, Kent and Buckinghamshire.

I shall also be referring in more detail to Global Marketing Europe UK Ltd, based at West Court, Mappin street, Sheffield. It operated a postal telegram scam, using the words "reply immediate". That was held by the ASA to be misleading, giving a false impression of the speed and urgency of reply. Those promoters sought to mislead the ASA, saying that the mailing was

> "part of a small test batch."

The promoters are the only people who would claim that.

In the 22 January edition of the ASA publication, another two complaints appear. The first is another complaint against Holiday Ownership Exchange. One would think that it would have learnt its lesson. The verdict on that complaint referred to

> "The promoters' persistent flouting of the self-regulatory system of control brought timeshare and sales promotion into disrepute."

Yet self-regulation is the watchword of the Minister and the Government. The second complaint in the latest edition of the ASA report was against Holiday Promotions Ltd, 22 Manchester street, London. Complaints had been received from Lincolnshire, Lancashire, Kent, London and Surrey. Again, the complaint was upheld and the offer of vouchers held to be highly misleading.

The problem continues to be massive but remains unaddressed. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Basingstoke for recognising that and for criticising the Government. In his excellent article in *The House Magazine* recently, he wrote of the Government's excuse that EC regulation and legislation were in the pipeline:

> "Meanwhile, it is right and proper that each member state does what it can to introduce domestic regulation. I regret that the Government have not done this".

The Bill is important and its provisions were outlined in the report of the Director General of Fair Trading who also specified a series of important legislative measures. The package that was proposed in 1990 to curb more than a decade of abuse by the timeshare industry was comprehensive and it was comprehensively ignored by the Minister. It included the requirement on those selling timeshare to provide, before any contract is signed, a written prospectus giving clear and comprehensive information under specified headings.

The Government's response? Nothing; no action. The package also included the right to withdraw from a contract without penalty during a 14-day cooling-off period. Again, there was no legislative response from the Government, who left the matter to be dealt with by a private Member.

Thirdly, the package specified the right to protection of advance payments by a system of bonding or some such system. The Government's action? Nothing.

The report also referred to the independent holding of title on behalf of timeshare owners. Again, there was no Government action. It referred to the need to protect management fees and funds from resale or rental. Again, there was no action from the Government. It referred to amendments to the Trade Descriptions Act, including its extension to the content of mail shots. Action had been promised by the Government last year, the year before and the year before that, and action has again been promised by the Minister today, but we know that the Minister and the Government cannot keep their word on this issue. There was no action on the director general's report. The Government have had one of the longest discussions ever of the Trade Descriptions Act, but there is still nothing ready for consultation—let alone a Green Paper, White Paper or legislation.

The final recommendation of the director general referred to the need for long-stop powers for the enforcement authorities to enable them to prevent repeated abuses. The Minister has urged the enforcement authorities to take action, even though he knows that his own Director General of Fair Trading has said that the enforcement officers—the trading standards officers—who are hard pressed cannot take sufficient action to curb the abuses.

I have a report from Barnsley trading standards officer and, Councillor Bill Neuman, the chairman of the consumer and environmental services committee, asking the Minister to accept the recommendations from the Office of Fair Trading and referring specifically to that final recommendation, which refers to the hamstringing of trading standards officers, who cannot at present take the necessary action to protect the public. The Minister responded to Bill Neuman in his characteristic way. He did absolutely nothing.

The Consumers Association has urged the Minister to take action and to lobby the EC on a number of issues. The association wants enshrined the right to title and provisions regarding the representation of management committees, many of which are bogus and do not represent those who have bought timeshare developments. It wants provision for cooling-off periods, the amendment of the Trade Descriptions Act, in respect of which we have had promises but no action, and regulation.

The Consumers Association—the largest private consumer organisation in Europe and the second largest in the world—makes another damning condemnation of the Minister:

> "We do not share the Minister's confidence that the industry will adequately police its own activities."

I wonder why that is, given that the industry has a history of self-regulation. Before the Timeshare Council came into being we had the Timeshare Development Association. I understand that the staff are the same. The Timeshare Developers Association was founded in 1987. From 1987 until it was reformed as the Timeshare Council last year, it disciplined only one member, in spite of receiving hundreds of written complaints. The member who was disciplined was not even fined but was charged £7,500 for the administrative costs incurred by the TDA in resolving the matter. Barratt—the biggest timeshare operator—and Wimpey quit the TDA because it was so ineffective. I am sorry to say that there is little evidence that the Timeshare Council is more effective, but at least its deputy chairman has not broken three of its rules—unlike the deputy chairman of the TDA, who refused to refund money, despite a five-day cooling-off period operated by the TDA, and placed misleading advertisements in the newspapers and not all of whose resorts belonged to the TDA.

The chairman was also accused of breaking the TDA codes of practice, although codes of practice are the mast to which the Minister has nailed his colours. They have been the biggest failure. Voluntary regulation has not worked, yet still the Minister hopes to rely on the good will of an industry riddled with malpractice to police itself and protect the consumer. That is the most disgraceful wishful thinking and, worse, leaves the public at the mercy of some of the worst elements of the industry.

I have outlined the abuses by the TDA. An interesting Department of Trade and Industry press notice, dated 10 August 1988 asked:

> "What organisation, do you imagine, insists that its members conduct themselves with 'integrity, dignity and the utmost courtesy'? The Advanced Motorists Association? The Society of Head Waiters? The Boiler-makers Union? Wrong. It is the Timeshare Developers Association."

Although the chairman and deputy chairman acted in breach of their own rules, that was, in practice, endorsed by a DTI press release in 1988. The trouble with the Government's whole approach to timeshare is that it has been conducted through press release and statement, not action—but action is coming.

The Minister did not seem to know that the EC is now considering providing a 28-day cooling-off period, which I welcome. I do not mean to criticise the Bill, because I know the intentions behind it, which is why we are giving it fair weather today, but if people are on holiday for three weeks and make the mistake of signing the contract during the first week, perhaps a 14-day cooling-off period will be a little short. I know, however, that the 14-day provision is all that the hon. Member for Basingstoke could get past the Minister and it must be recognised that a 14-day period, enforceable by law, is much better than anything that has been produced by the Government, the TDA or the Timeshare Council.

The Minister claims that he cannot introduce laws in this country because they would not be enforceable in the EC. How wrong can one get? If only he had asked the Library to do some basic homework he would have found that Portugal has had laws to regulate the timeshare market since 1981, which is more than 10 years ago. Timeshare laws are also enforced in France. The Minister has used the excuse of EC regulations to ensure that this market remains as free as he demands for all parts of the market. It is free market ideology that stops the Government and the Minister from legislating—nothing else; otherwise how could Portugal and France have legislated on this matter?

With the exception of Wyoming, all the states of the United States have had laws to regulate timeshare for some time. Thirty-five states have enacted specific timeshare legislation and 14 have managed to incorporate such legislation into their existing laws. That is powerful evidence that the Minister is simply making the same old excuses now for the timeshare industry as he has made throughout his period in office, thus continuing the disreputable practice of his predecessors.

Other countries are fighting for improvements for timeshares arrangements but, sadly, we are not one. Our voice is not heard loudly on this issue——

Mr. Leigh: Who asked the Commission to put down a directive?

Mr. Griffiths: Demand for that was pronounced, not only from Great Britain but from other European countries also. The Portuguese have had laws on this matter for over 10 years and did not want to see unscrupulous timeshare practices——

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Mr. Griffiths: Let me finish.

Portugual did not want other countries' unscrupulous timeshare practices to extend to Portuguese soil. The directive was given fair weather by everyone at the European Commission. The question is, "How long did it take the Minister to make that request?" The Minister does not seem to want to intervene too quickly now, which is no wonder. Anyone who has visited resorts in Spain, Malta, other Mediterannean countries or the Canaries will have experienced people with clipboards and so-called "questionnaires" accosting them in the street. It is clear that British holidaymakers are used to shooing timeshare agents away from them on Spanish beaches or in Maltese bars.

What happened in Spain in the 1980s is now happening in Surrey in the 1990s. A company has been pretending to conduct market research in British high streets, asking people half a dozen questions about their holidays and entering them in a spot-the-beachball competition. A week later, that person receives a telephone call from Holiday Promotions Ltd. in Milton Keynes. People such as Mr. and Mrs. Chris Greet are told that they have won a free holiday in Florida and have to pay only for the flight. Holiday Promotions Ltd. instructs its staff to say specifically that they are not selling timeshare or double glazing. However, Mr. Keith Moore of Holiday Promotions then wrote to Mr. and Mrs. Greet inviting the family to a holiday exhibition. The letter states:

> "This is not a timeshare".

Mr. Moore was lying. The family went to the exhibition at the offices of Globelink Marketing, which is based in New Malden. There was no exhibition, only a timeshare promotion. Globelink and its managers, Anton Tardif and Alasdair McKinnon, have deliberately set out to deceive people.

After 13 years, thousands of duped customers, millions of disgracefully misleading promotions promising bogus prizes, and a damning Office of Fair Trading report, the Government's tough action amounts to half a dozen press releases, all of them signifying nothing.

At least three companies in the United Kingdom, which are now operating under the Minister's nose, are bringing the most disreputable practices from Spain to our high streets. But the Minister does what he and his predecessors have always done—precisely nothing. Soon, however, in a few weeks or months, there will be a Labour Minister for Consumer Affairs, and DTI inspectors will pay a visit to Holiday Promotions UK Limited and to Globelink Marketing and to FCH Promotions. The latter organisation has been operating with the timeshare company, Golden Portfolio Holidays, luring people to timeshare presentations in this country with prizes which are then always out of stock. Clients have to apply for their prizes in writing after the promotion to FCG Promotions in Hayes, Middlesex, which charges £39·95 for sending the prize. There is no listed telephone number for FCH. Among its disappointed and duped customers is a Mr. Lilley, who was promised a video recorder if he attended the promotion. But Mr. Lilley did not get the video recorder, and is very annoyed. His annoyance will be behind him when the Government take proper action to ensure that that practice is legislated out of existence.

Action can be taken in this country to control the abuses that have been highlighted this morning. Why has not the European Community legislation deterred the Portuguese or the French from producing their own

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legislation? How can those countries overcome the obstacles that the Minister says lie in the way of his legislating to protect our citizens? How can the citizens of those countries be offered protection from misleading promotions, unbuilt facilities and unsatisfactory management agreements when ours cannot? The answer is because consumer legislation is given a low priority in this country. The Labour party, however, has a plan to tackle that. It involves taking on board the report of the Director General of Fair Trading and legislating to ensure that proper laws are implemented to give full protection and to prevent the abuses that were highlighted in the report. Action must be taken to enforce the recommendations. Our plan includes the cooling-off period of 14 days, for which the hon. Member for Basingstoke has provided. It includes providing tight controls over service charges and introducing penalties for those who make misleading statements about services and facilities, especially where the facilities have not been built and the services not provided. It includes stiff fines if bogus prizes are used to lure people to sales talks; the sales prospectus being provided, giving the contract in plain English and specific information laid down by the Director General of Fair Trading; and a bonding scheme to protect deposits and other moneys that are handed over. We will give power to trading standards officers to enforce the legislation.

I repeat to the Minister an offer that we made earlier today in consultation with the hon. Member for Basingstoke. We offered to let the Bill go through all its stages today on the Floor of the House and be in place before the general election to provide people with protection. Sadly, I understand that the Bill requires a money resolution which cannot be made available in time. I am sorry about that. I tell the Minister now that we will not wait over the next few weeks and months for the general election and see the Bill's enactment delayed in Committee or any other way. We will back the hon. Member for Basingstoke. I am sure that there is support from both sides of the House to ensure that the legislation is passed and the abuses are stopped once and for all. The foot-dragging must stop. It will not stop under this Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Home Rule (Scotland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read—[Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown signified.]

12.29 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill comes before the House by an accident of timing that, nevertheless, makes it of particular political relevance not only to the people of Scotland but to the people of the United Kingdom.

My Bill would establish a new constitutional settlement for Scotland, create a Parliament with a fixed four-year term, provide for elections by a system of proportional representation, establish a Bill of Rights, create the office of ombudsman, give to the Parliament revenue-raising responsibility, entrench these arrangements in such a way that they could not be changed without the consent of both the Westminster and Scottish Parliaments and provide that all Scottish domestic affairs should be the responsibility of a Parliament sitting in Edinburgh, reserving foreign affairs, defence and large-scale economics to Westminster. The Bill also contains special provisions for the islands, to which I suspect my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) will wish to pay special reference, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The purpose of the Bill goes beyond that to which I have already referred. It is conceived as the first step towards a written constitution for the United Kingdom. It is drafted in such a way that the essential reform of the United Kingdom constitution will be a logical second step.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: I should like to make progress. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will endeavour to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and in the light of the number of Conservative Back Benchers who have chosen to be present, it would seem that he has a reasonable opportunity of doing so.

The Bill draws on the scheme proposed by the constitutional convention. Indeed, it goes beyond that, so far as is necessary to promote a written constitution based on federal principles.

The Bill provides a scheme to recreate in Scotland a Parliament with all the dignity and style to which the Scottish people are entitled. The scheme recognises the distinctive nature of the Scottish legal system and Scottish institutions. It is a scheme, too, that rejects the exclusiveness of nationalism. To acknowledge a legitimate sense of national identity is far removed from the intellectual self-satisfaction of nationalism. Nationalism, as history demonstrates, is a crude, blunt force, too easily convertible into bitterness and selfishness, too easily manipulated into intolerance and too easily transformed into introspection.

On this occasion it is only right to give some historical analysis of the government of Scotland since the Union. Throughout the years of Union Scotland, unlike Wales, has acquired separate legislation throughout domestic matters. That is a major anomaly which the British Parliament has accepted because it has no alternative. The anomaly has not always worked entirely to the advantage of Scotland because, as a result of the requirements of a separate legal system, the British Parliament cannot meet fully the need for modernising, reforming and improving that legal system. Scotland is the only territory on the face of the earth which has a legal system without a legislature to improve, modernise and amend it.

> "There are other distinctive Scottish characteristics as well. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Scotland was governed in a different way from the rest of Britain, with different administrative powers, different local government and a different structure of education. In 1885 a Scottish Secretary was appointed, and in the 1920s he was elevated to Secretary of State. In the 1930s the Scottish Office was sent lock, stock and barrel to Edinburgh. All this administrative devolution was done by Conservative Governments, and it was not done out of a feeling of national sentiment, but because of the administrative requirements needed to achieve good government for the Scottish people.
>
> It may be asked why, if we have had this enormous devolution and if Parliament, with a unitary system, is able to respond to the distinct needs of Scotland, this should not continue. It may be asked why, with a separate legal system and a separate Scottish Office, it is necessary to go any further and establish a directly-elected Assembly."

The answer is that during the past 200 years or more a dynamic change has taken place.

> "This is not because the people have changed their minds but because of the increasing complexity of government, requiring more and more administrative devolution, and more powers to be given to the Scottish Office.
>
> We have now a Secretary of State for Scotland who is for all practical purposes a Scottish Prime Minister. He covers a Department the equivalent of which in England and Wales is served by eight or nine Ministries. He has one Department, and Scottish Members are expected to scrutinise his actions. The Scottish Office has more civil servants than the European Commission . . .
>
> There has been a qualitative change in the call for devolution. In the early twentieth century the demand for a separate Scottish Legislature was the result of national sentiment. That national sentiment still exists, but added to it is the need for good government, good administration and a better deal for Scottish people within the United Kingdom."

Those words may seem familiar to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is hardly surprising, because since I embarked upon this historical analysis I have been quoting virtually verbatim from a speech made on 16 December 1976 in this House by the now right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), which can be found at columns 1832 and 1833 of the *Official Report* for that date.

What the right hon. and learned Gentleman said then has, over time, come to be seen yet more acutely as a cogent and sensible analysis of the needs of Scotland as we approach the end of the century.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): The Bill would remove from the United Kingdom Cabinet any power over any matter relating to Scottish governance. Given that it would remove the functions of the Secretary of State for Scotland to a Scottish Parliament, the hon. and learned Gentleman would presumably accept that there is no role for a Scottish Secretary of State, or Scottish Prime Minister to use his terminology, within the United Kingdom Cabinet. Therefore, he would remove the voice of Scotland from the Cabinet of the United Kingdom and from the decision-making process of the United Kingdom as a whole, including decisions on taxation and foreign affairs. Is that in Scotland's best interests?

Mr. Campbell: It is in Scotland's best interest to have exclusive responsibility for the conduct of its own domestic affairs. It would also be in Scotland's interest to have influence over defence, foreign affairs and large-scale economics. The financial scheme attached to the Bill demonstrates that it would be in Scotland's interest to have an influence over overall levels of taxation in the United Kingdom. All that can be achieved without necessarily retaining the existing office of the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Unlike the Labour party, for which this is a matter of great difficulty, my party and its predecessor have never shrunk from the fact that if one has effective devolution, and an effective Parliament with the powers that the Bill would establish, the case for the retention of a Scottish Secretary of State in Cabinet would be weakened.

Likewise, unlike the Labour party, my party and its predecessor have had no difficulty with the proposition that if we create a Scottish Parliament with the kind of effective deveolution which the Bill proposes, the case for the retention of the same numbers of Members of Parliament who presently come from Scotland to Westminster would be weakened. Indeed, in its evidence to the Kilbrandon commisson, my party accepted that if its then proposals had been accepted by the commission, the case for a reduction in Scottish Members to, say, 58 or 59 would have been hard to resist.

Mr. Bill Walker *rose*——

Mr. Campbell: I wish to make a little progress before giving way.

When the present Secretary of State addressed the House on that occasion, he might also have taken the opportunity to draw to the attention of the House and to remind the public outside, particularly in Scotland, that the nature of sovereignty in the Scottish constitutional tradition is different from that of Westminster.

I refer in that context to the observations of Lord President Cooper in MacCormick *v.* The Lord Advocate in 1953, when Lord Cooper, generally regarded as one of the foremost Scottish jurists of this century, said:

> "The principle of the unlimited sovereignty of Parliament is a distinctively English principle which has no counterpart in Scottish constitutional law . . . Considering that the Union legislation extinguished the Parliaments of Scotland and England and replaced them by a new Parliament, I have difficulty in seeing why it should have been supposed that the new Parliament of Great Britain must inherit all the peculiar characteristics of the English Parliament but none of the Scottish Parliament, as if all that happened in 1707 was that Scottish representatives were admitted to the Parliament of England. This is not what was done."

That judgment, passed in 1953, has never been challenged, as it might have been by an appeal to the House of Lords sitting in its appellate civil jurisdiction capacity.

Why is the case for a Parliament such as we propose now so strong? First, whichever opinion poll one reads, the great weight of Scottish political opinion is dissatisfied with the present constitutional arrangements. The great weight of Scottish opinion believes that the distinctive nature of Scottish life, with its own legal system, its own philosophy on education and its own traditions, is insufficiently recognised by the United Kingdom Parliament.

The great weight of Scottish opinion believes, with justification, that Scottish legislation and domestic affairs are invariably an afterthought in measures designed for England and Wales. The great weight of Scottish opinion finds it difficult to understand why, contrary to its Standing Orders, the House of Commons has been unable to establish a Select Committee to scrutinise Scottish

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affairs. The great weight of opinion in Scotland is outraged at the fact that the present Government can barely find enough Members from Scottish constituencies to fill the ministerial appointments in the Scottish Office.

Mr. Bill Walker: That is not so.

Mr. Campbell: There is a Whip who does not represent a Scottish constituency. Indeed, nor did his predecessor represent a Scottish constituency.

Home rule for Scotland would show the rest of the United Kingdom that government devolved from the centre is an opportunity to be seized with enthusiasm. In our commitment as a party to home rule, we proceed on the footing not only that the distinctive characteristics of Scotland and its people need expression and institutions of government, but that the demands of modern government require those institutions to be immediate, sensitive and properly democratic.

Home rule and proportional representation are the means by which we shall break the stranglehold of Westminster. They are also the means by which we shall provide a system of government which commands the confidence of all the people, in which the democratic deficit is made good and in which pluralism is entrenched.

I say without qualification that home rule without proportional representation would not be home rule at all, and I would not support any measure to bring devolved government to Scotland which did not have PR as its centrepiece, for, however desirable it would be to create a Parliament in Edinburgh, to create one as unfair and undemocratic as that which we have here would be a betrayal of the people of Scotland.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledge and welcome the moves by the Labour party in Scotland, endorsed nationally, for the new Scottish Parliament to be elected by a system of proportional representation?

Mr. Campbell: I accept and welcome the progressive nature of the Labour party's views on proportionality. But I question whether, under Professor Plant's most recent proposal, proportionality will be achieved. I am anxious that a list system in which the lists are provided by parties might be less than democratic. However, I welcome without any difficulty the progression in Labour party thinking from a first-past-the-post system to a system of proportionality.

In my Bill, for which I seek a Second Reading today, the provision is that Parliament should be elected by the single transferable vote in the first instance, but thereafter, in subsequent elections, Parliament should be free to determine its own electoral system as long as that is consistent with the principles of proportionality.

There is always some value in looking back in history, and I offer a quotation that best seems to describe what we are about today. It states:

> "as to the future, we have to secure for Scotland a much more direct and convenient method of bringing her influence to bear upon her own purely domestic affairs. There is nothing which conflicts with the integrity of the United Kingdom in securing to Scotsmen in that or some other way an effective means of shaping the special legislation which affects them and only them. Certainly I am of the opinion that if such a scheme can be brought into existence it will mean a great enrichment not only of the national life of Scotland, but of the policies and public life of the United Kingdom."

Those words were spoken in Dundee on 3 October 1911 by Winston Churchill.

What is the Government's position? The Secretary of State is implacably opposed to any measure of the sort that my Bill embraces. As I understand it, he offers a choice between the status quo and independence. I understand him to say that if there is a democratic vote for the status quo, it will be honoured, as will a democratic vote for independence. But if there is a democratic vote for reform, the Secretary of State says that that is to be ignored.

The Secretary of State argues that to allow what my Bill proposes would be to place Scotland at the top of a slippery slope, but his attitude has the effect of placing Scotland at the edge of a cliff. If the pages of the national newspapers of Scotland are to be believed, increasing numbers of his own party do not accept his analysis——

Mr. Bill Walker: How many?

Mr. Campbell: Sir Russell Fairgrieve, who is a former chairman of the Conservative party in Scotland. I cannot imagine that, as Sir Russell was granted that post, he is regarded as anything other than a man with eminently good sense. Others include Councillor Brian Meek, Mr. Struan Stevenson, Councillor Christine Richards and Mr. Arthur Bell, who I know is a particular favourite of the Under-Secretary of State. Those are all prominent Scottish Conservatives who have made it clear that they believe that the Conservative party should have joined, and even now should still join, the Scottish Constitutional Convention.

It is clear that, in the Conservative and Unionist party in Scotland, there is a substantial measure of support for devolution. If hon. Members are dissatisfied with my list, I can also cite the example of a distinguished former Member of the House, Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith, whose principled support of devolution all his political life was, among many other factors, a proper mark of his integrity and desire to see the best government for Scotland.

At the centre of this argument is the question whether a Parliament should have the right to be responsible for revenue. The Government's position is that a tax-raising power in the technical sense inevitably means that taxes will be raised. That is a proposition without logic, because the power contained in the Bill is a power to vary income tax: it may be raised or it may be lowered depending on the political judgment of those who form the majority in a Scottish Parliament.

The Government's arguments do not, however, deal with the question that runs as follows: if the Parliament in Scotland decided to raise taxation, would it not be entitled so to do if a majority in favour of that existed? Similarly, if it chose to reduce taxation, that too would be democratically justified. Is not the responsibility of determining the level of revenue, at least within a variation, precisely what is needed to make a Parliament responsible? The noble Lord Home certainly thought so in 1979. Was he right then when he told the people of Scotland, "Don't vote for the proposals of the Labour party because they do not contain any responsibility for raising revenue. Reject them, and we in the Conservative party will bring you a better scheme"? We have waited for some time for any scheme, let alone one that would justify being called better than the proposals of 1979.

It is to these important matters that the people to whom I have already referred—distinguished members of the Conservative and Unionist party in Scotland—are already turning their minds, away from the implacable nature of the Secretary of State's response.

There are other straws in the wind. At a not-much-reported occasion in north Berwick last Friday night, the right hon. and learned Member for Pentlands made a speech of an accomplished delphic nature in which he said that, if change were to be allowed, independence would be the least advantageous change. I have no doubt that were he here today he would tell us that he was merely offering the hypothesis as a basis for argument; but bearing in mind that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is the author of the words that I uttered a moment or two ago in support of the analysis of the historical nature of the government of Scotland, the Government should certainly take some account of this further straw in the wind.

Mr. Bowis: If Scotland were to have a Parliament with tax-raising powers, it could of course raise taxes that it wanted to raise, but the people of Scotland should be aware that there would then be no capping and no one to protect them from excessive expenditure decided by Strathclyde or Lothian.

The point about the cost of the measure and the additional tax that will be needed relates to present circumstances. Scotland receives 25 per cent. more per head from United Kingdom taxation than the rest of the United Kingdom, so unless England, of its benevolence, gave more tax revenues to Scotland there would have to be a 5p increase in tax just to stand still. These are not my figures; they were recently published in the Scottish newspapers, including the non-Conservative *Daily Record.*

Mr. Campbell: That of course assumes that everything spent on transport in England is a national cost and that the policing of London is a national cost, but we say that once we settle down and allocate the nature of expenditure as between the two countries, disallowing the cost of running the southern region of the railways as a United Kingdom expense, it is perfectly clear, as the Scottish newspapers have often demonstrated under the heading "Scotching the Myth"—Scottish Television has demonstrated the same in a programme of the same name—that there is no question of Scotland being subsidised in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

If that is the hon. Gentleman's anxiety, he has not read the Bill. The Bill provides that a Scottish Parliament would have the right to vary upwards or downwards from the United Kingdom's established level of personal income tax. It could act in that regard only and in none other—no alteration of VAT, no alteration in corporation tax, only alterations in personal income tax. While people in Scotland are flattered that in Battersea they think of nothing else but the protection of the people of Scotland from excessive expenditure, I fancy that the people of Scotland are mature enough to elect or to refuse to re-elect Governments who do not conduct taxation affairs in the way in which they wish.

If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the position of his party in Scotland, he should have regard to the fact that, at the 1987 general election, the city of Glasgow returned 11 Labour Members of Parliament. However, 25 per cent. of those who voted in Glasgow voted Conservative. Therefore, the first-past-the-post system ensures that a Conservative voter living in Glasgow has no representative in Westminster. If we had proportional representation, the Conservative party would find itself with rather more influence in a Parliament in Scotland than it has here.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is the hon. and learned Gentleman aware that not one Member of Parliament from the Scottish National party is present, although I am sure that, in common with everyone else in Scotland, we shall be challenged by it to hear statements about its separatist policies? The hon. and learned Gentleman will agree that SNP Members of Parliament should be here today to debate this honourable Bill. Furthermore, they have taken no part in the great debate in the Scottish Constitutional Convention, although there is still a seat available for that party.

Mr. Campbell: I can confirm as a matter of fact that the Scottish National party did not join the convention, although some distinguished individuals, no doubt at some political disadvantage to themselves, were prepared to do so. I can confirm that there is no SNP Member of Parliament present to hear this debate today.

Whatever the progress of my Bill, one thing is clear beyond doubt. After the forthcoming general election, the constitutional position in Scotland will be reviewed, whatever the composition of the Government. It is clear that the present arrangements will not survive. My Bill is an attempt to satisfy the needs of the people of Scotland, and it is designed to open the door to the necessary constitutional reform for the rest of the United Kingdom.

12.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I congratulate the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) on his good fortune in the private Members' ballot. Given the number that he drew in the ballot, it was not certain that he would have the chance of a debate on his Bill, but he has had that opportunity and has spoken with his customary mellifluence. Some of his expressions of outrage were a little overdone. I do not believe that the people of Scotland are up in arms over the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) is, among his many other duties, the Scottish Whip. I have not noticed many placards complaining about that bedecking the streets of Edinburgh or Glasgow.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend reflect on the mirror image of those charges, when one looks at the Liberal Democrat and Labour party Front-Bench spokesmen to see how many come from Scottish constituencies and frequently and regularly speak on purely English matters?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is right. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) has just spoken in a debate on a United Kingdom Bill and is entirely entitled to do so.

I am glad to note that the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is with us. I noted, after the recent widely publicised opinion poll in Scotland showing that 50 per cent. of the Scottish electorate favoured independence, that he was quoted on television and in the press as saying

[Mr. Stewart]

that a Scottish Parliament would be a first step. The first question before the House today, therefore, is whether his hon. and learned Friend's Bill is a first step.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that if the majority of the people of Scotland vote for independence, they should be entitled to have it? That appears to be the position of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. What my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said was entirely consistent with that.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Member for Gordon said that a Scottish Parliament would be a first step towards independence. If I misunderstood him, the hon. Gentleman will no doubt correct me.

The hon. and learned Member referred to opinion polls. Is it not surprising that after several years of unremitting devolutionist propaganda from the Scottish Constitutional Convention, support for devolution is almost at an all-time low, according to the opinion polls?

Mr. Bowis: The point that my hon. Friend has just made might explain why, if there is uncertainty in Scotland, there is also uncertainty among Scottish Liberal party members. That may explain why, although 10 Scottish Liberal Members of Parliament appear as sponsors on the face of the Bill, only three have managed to turn up today.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is arithmetically correct. That proportion is, however, rather greater than the proportion of Scottish National party Members or, for that matter, Labour Members who are here. I see that Scottish Labour Back Benchers are heavily represented by the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) who is listening with his customary attention to my remarks.

May I return to the point made by the hon. and learned Member about the views of certain members of my party. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) has made it unequivocally clear over a long period of years that he is wholly opposed to unilateral devolution, which is what the Bill proposes. I hope that the hon. and learned Member forgave me when I chortled happily when he read out the names of about four members of the Scottish Conservative party who are in favour of this assembly. According to the press, the vote at the Scottish Conservative party conference in 1988 at Perth was about 600 to 12, the 12 being in favour of devolution, one of whom, I happen to know, voted that way simply because he was sorry for the minority. That leaves 11. Those 11 votes include the names of the persons to whom the hon. and learned Friend referred. I do not deny for a moment that about 0·01 per cent. of Scottish Conservative party members have always taken that view.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend also note that, unlike the Liberal party, whose individual members have held this view for a long time, what is most interesting is the view held by senior members of the Liberal Democrat party in Scotland who are now calling for separatism?

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Not true.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. and learned Member says that that is not true. Like him, I do not necessarily automatically accept everything that is stated in Scottish newspapers. Those Liberal Democrats, whom I saw quoted as being in favour of the Scottish National party's position, will no doubt clarify their position in due course.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: May I bring the Minister back to the tiny proportion of Scottish Conservatives who, he claims, support any form of devolution? Does he rule out any constitutional change? If not, what is the Conservative party contemplating?

Mr. Allan Stewart: I can make the position absolutely clear. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, the Union is not set in concrete; it has changed over time, but, broadly speaking, we favour the current constitutional arrangements. There has been some administrative devolution, to which the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East referred. The Conservative and Unionist party will fight the next general election as the party of the Union.

Mr. Graham: I am glad to see that the Minister is fine and fit, because it was reported that he was ill.

Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that opinion poll after opinion poll in Scotland has shown support for the quest of the Scottish Constitutional Convention for a Scottish Parliament? The recent survey showing that 50 per cent. of Scottish people want independence resulted from the Government's decimation of the Scottish industrial base, such as Ravenscraig, Armitage Shanks, which is in the Minister's constituency, and the litany of factory closures and job losses and from increasing poverty in Scotland. People are angry and are pitching hard because of the polarisation of the debate between the status quo or independence. The people of Scotland have proved for years that they support an assembly. Why will not the Minister take part in that debate?

Mr. Stewart: May I make two points in reply to the hon. Gentleman? First, the much-publicised recent opinion poll showed that 70 per cent. of Scottish people oppose the proposals of the Scottish Constitutional Convention. They favoured either independence or the status quo. Secondly, of course it is true, and it always has been, that if people are asked, "Do you think that a Scottish assembly or a Scottish Parliament is a good idea?", most tend to give a positive response. That was true before the last referendum in 1979. When people are faced not with broad philosophy but a specific choice, opinion changes markedly.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The Secretary of State said that if the majority of Members elected from Scotland were Scottish National party Members, the Government would regard that as a vote for independence and accept it. If after the next election there is a clear majority of Members committed to reforming the United Kingdom and creating a Parliament for Scotland within the United Kingdom, will the Conservative party accept the verdict of the people of Scotland?

Mr. Stewart: The reform of the United Kingdom Parliament, as the hon. Member refers to it, will take place if there is a majority within the United Kingdom Parliament for that reform. The hon. Member must recognise that England is a partner in the Act of Union.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: We can have independence but not reform.

Mr. Stewart: What I am saying is perfectly clear and straightforward. If a party obtains a majority in the House on a programme of reform, it will endeavour to pass legislation through the House.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Minister should clarify the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). It is obvious, by the very nature of things, that the Scottish National party could win all 72 seats in Scotland and not have a majority in the House. At what point does he think that there is a majority for independence, and at what point is there a majority for reform in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Stewart: I think that there is a majority for what the hon. Gentleman refers to as reform within the United Kingdom when that case commands a majority in the House. It is as simple as that.—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is making the political point that if the SNP had 72 Scottish Members of Parliament as he posits, sovereignty would remain with the House, but the House would conclude that the Act of Union was no longer sustainable. However, the ultimate decision would have to rest with the House—that is clear.

I shall deal now with some of the detailed aspects of the Bill. As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, it is always the case that the more one considers the details of specific proposals, the more problems arise. That has always been the case and remains so, and it is true of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) asked the fairly obvious question about the role of the Secretary of State—would there be one? Would he be responsible only for Scotland? Would he be of Cabinet rank? The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde is clear about the answer, but the rest of the Opposition do not agree with him. He is clear, I think, that there would not be a Secretary of State for Scotland, but that is not the Labour party's view. Already, on that simple and straightforward question raised by my hon. Friend, the so-called united front on devolution has fallen apart fairly quickly.—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde said something from a sedentary position which I did not catch.

Mr. Graham: The Minister asserted that the devolution scenario has fallen flat, but that is absolutely untrue. The massive majority of people in Scotland have a clear desire for a devolved Parliament in Scotland. The Minister should test that.

Mr. Stewart: I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman was going to say whether he was in favour of the Liberal Democrats' position that there should not be a Secretary of State and on Labour's position that there should be.

Mr. Graham: That is not important.

Mr. Stewart: Oh, the hon. Gentleman does not think that it is important—I suppose that that is one way to answer questions about the British constitution.

I deal now with how the role of Scottish Members of Parliament would fit in the scheme. Again, the Opposition were immediately divided on this simple question. I have to give it to the Liberal Democrats that they realised that there is a problem. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East was honest enough to say that they—the Liberals and the Liberal Democrats—had always accepted that in the context of Scottish Assembly or Parliament there would be fewer Scottish Members of Parliament at Westminster. That is not the Labour party's position. Labour believes that when a Scottish Assembly or Parliament had been set up Scotland would still have 72 Members of Parliament at Westminster. Does any objective commentator accept that as a reasonable proposition? No.

Stormont is something of a precedent in this issue, although not necessarily a tremendously powerful historical case for devolution. The number of Scottish Members of Parliament would be less than 40 according to that precedent. The number of Members of Parliament does not answer the West Lothian question, because it is not about numbers. The West Lothian question, which the devolutionists have spent the past 12 years failing to answer, is why this House should tolerate a situation in which Scottish Members of Parliament could vote decisively on English education, English housing and English local government when neither they nor the English Members of Parliament could vote on comparable Scottish matters.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend consider Kent, where there may not be a single Labour Member? Kent still has grammar schools, but they could be abolished by the votes of Scottish Members. Kent, where there is not a single Labour Member, would see its grammar schools abolished if this rather peculiar proposal were implemented.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The position would be intolerable and unacceptable. It is conning the people of Scotland to suggest that there is not a problem and that the matter can be resolved in due course. The West Lothian question goes right to the heart of the proposals for devolution. There is a fundamental flaw of which the Liberal Democrats at least show some recognition, although they do not answer the problem because they cannot answer it.

I recall the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) saying in the House, in answer to a question from me, that he thought that the West Lothian question was unanswerable. It is, and the Bill provides an answer.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The first step to federalism.

Mr. Stewart: The first step to federalism? I thought that it was independence.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East said that the proposed Scottish Paliament would be entrenched—an interesting concept. Once established, it could not be disbanded. It would be a creature of statute set up by Act of Parliament—this Parliament. For it to be entrenched would require some part of the enabling statute to be irreversible, which is outwith the power of Parliament. That is not and cannot be devolution. Power devolved is power retained. The proposal is not devolution.

Mr. Wallace: It is federalism.

Mr. Stewart: It is not devolution. We are agreed on that. The Bill then is not a devolutionary proposal, but an entirely new animal.

[Mr. Stewart]

The Bill would require this sovereign Parliament to set up a lower tier of government in such a way that it surrendered the power to amend or repeal its own statute. That would be a far greater step of surrendering the sovereign authority of this Parliament in favour of the created body, if it could be done. It is absolutely clear that one cannot uphold the Union of the Parliaments on that basis. If one is able to set up an entrenched sovereign parliament of some sort, one cannot at the same time uphold the Union of Parliaments. That point is probably agreed and I do not think that the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East is talking about the upholding of the Union of Parliaments.

The next point that the hon. and learned Gentleman emphasised to the House was the central importance for the proposals of proportional representation. We do not know how many members his body would wish to have, although we are told that it would be between 75 and 125. We are told that the exact number would be determined by the electoral commission for Scotland, which would be set up under the Bill, and that the system would be the single transferable vote system of proportional representation. Interestingly, that is not the form of proportional representation being proposed for the Scottish Constitutional Convention on which I thought the proposals were supposed to be based.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Read the Bill.

Mr. Stewart: As I understand it, the proposal for the Scottish Constitutional Convention is the added member system. I am not an expert on the many forms of proportional representation—AMS, ATV, STV, Sky News—once we have heard one, we have heard them all. There are substantial arguments against proportional representation and the proposal in the Bill is quite different from that put forward by the Scottish Constitutional Convention.

Let me deal with some of the financial aspects of the proposals. How would a Scottish assembly work in practice, and what would it cost? The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East has said that the body that he proposes would have the power to vary income tax up to 3p above or below the United Kingdom rate of tax. I am sure that those with economic expertise will agree that the consequences of a separate tax regime in Scotland are unpredictable. The ramifications, both within and without Scotland, could be highly detrimental to Scotland's business and to Scotland's interests abroad. Why alter income tax rates but not rates for indirect taxes? Would business rates be cut to encourage inward investment?

The hon. and learned Gentleman says that macro-economic policy would be retained by the Westminster Parliament and central Government yet he proposes to give the Scottish Assembly or Parliament power to raise or lower income tax by 3p in the pound, and to do that is to place a major area of macro-economic policy outside the control of the Treasury. We could be talking about up to 2·5 per cent. of GDP—from one extreme to the other. The hon. and learned Gentleman cannot argue that macro-economic will be retained by Westminster while at that same time arguing for such tax-raising powers.

The hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the level of taxation and expenditure in Scotland, about which there has been a great deal of comment. I must say that "Scotching the Myth" seemed to me rather high on assertion and rather low on arithmetic. There is no doubt, however, that identifiable general Government expenditure per head in Scotland is 24 per cent. higher than in England. Put another way, for every £4 spent in England, we spend £5 in Scotland. There are, of course, reasons for those figures.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will also realise that the Scots represent just under 9 per cent. of the United Kingdom population. Can he confirm that the Scots do not pay that percentage of the income tax contributed to the centre? The figure that they pay is less, which means that other areas are paying more income tax relative to the number of people living there.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is right, and that is because incomes are higher, particularly in the south-east of England. There is no doubt that Scotland does relatively well in expenditure terms.

I was interested to read paragraph 32(e) of schedule 1 which proposes powers

> "to initiate forms of public ownership or control in the public interest".

I take it that those powers will not necessarily be used in relation to the steel industry, as I think that the hon. and learned Gentleman is against that.

Mr. Wallace: I do not know whether the Minister is about to make a point about the preparation of a socialist revolution. He must recognise, however, that the Westminster Parliament has powers to take companies into public ownership. The exercise of those powers would depend on which party was in control in the Scottish Parliament—just as their exercise here depends on which party has an overall majority in this Parliament.

Mr. Stewart: Parliament can take powers to pass particular forms of public ownership, but the new Scottish Parliament would be given a very general power to nationalise whatever it wanted.

I should like to outline the economic and industrial powers that are proposed by the Bill for the new body. First, it would duplicate functions that are best administered at a United Kingdom level. Secondly, it would triplicate structures that are already in place in Scotland for the delivery of, for example, education and training policy. It also would undoubtedly complicate the layers of bureaucracy and the administration that is necessary to oversee Scotland's economic and industrial development.

The Bill contains proposals on relations with the European Community. Its first proposal is for the establishment of a representative office. Secondly, it suggests an entitlement for the executive to be represented on all United Kingdom ministerial delegations to the Councils of Ministers. That ignores the fact that the Scottish Office already has a representative office through UKREP, with which we have extremely close relationships. Scottish Office Ministers can already attend Council of Ministers meetings, at which their presence is important, such as for discussions on fishing. What is supposed to happen under the new arrangements when somebody from the executive of one political party has to join a United Kingdom team of a different political party? The Bill does not address the way in which such arguments can be resolved.

The hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde, who has left his place for a moment, alleged that the demand for constitutional change somehow related to the state of the Scottish economy. During the past 12 years or so many Opposition Members and their allies in Scotland —I do not accuse the Liberal Democrats of this—have sneered at or regarded with contempt every bit of industrial good news. They have consistently alleged over a period that the problems of the Scottish economy are the fault of the constitutional system, saying that if the constitution were changed, the problems would be resolved.

Let us assume for a moment that the Bill had been on the statute book a few years ago. Which industrial problem would have been resolved? Would the problems of Ravenscraig or of Armitage Shanks have been resolved? Would the problems that face our modern telecommunications and electronics industries, which also face all such industries worldwide, have been resolved? The answer is that they would not have been resolved. There is no way in which the proposals could have changed the circumstances of those industries. However, if the proposals had been in force, there would undoubtedly have been a climate of considerable uncertainty about Scotland's constitutional future and a climate in which taxes in Scotland could increase over and above the rate in the rest of the United Kingdom, thus making Scotland the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom. That would have been bound to be damaging to our growth industries and to the case for inward investment where we have been markedly successful in a tough, competitive market. We have been markedly successful because the Government changed the institutional arrangements in that area. To be in favour of the Union is not to be in favour of an unchanging status quo. We changed the arrangements for Locate in Scotland, for example—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gordon sneers——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The change was administrative, not constitutional.

Mr. Stewart: It is indeed administrative. It is an example of administrative change that the Government have introduced. It has been highly successful and is practical and sensible. It has been put to good use on behalf of the people of Scotland. That is the kind of sensible change that we have introduced and will continue to introduce.

There are two fundamental arguments against the Bill. First, there are no answers to some of the practical questions that I have put to the House. One can always advance a broad-brush argument in favour of fundamental constitutional change——

Mr. Wallace: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: I am about to finish—but the more one gets down to the nitty gritty, the more arguments become clear and the more the difficulties become overwhelming.

Secondly, the business community and wealth creators in Scotland have most to fear not from a one-off constitutional change, but from the fact that a constitutional change such as this would in no sense be the end of the road. There is a simple reason why it would not be the end of the road. If the arrangements were perceived to be working well, the Scottish National party would say, "Make them work better. Let us have full independence." If the arrangements were perceived to be working badly, as it is my belief that they would, the SNP would be in even better position and could say, "We have tried this half-way house, O people of Scotland, and it does not work. Westminster is not giving us enough money. It is all the fault of Westminster. This does not work. Give us more power." At that stage Westminster, wholly fed up with the procedure, would almost certainly say, "Let Scotland have independence, in any event." That would be the inevitable result of unilateral devolution as proposed by the hon. and learned Gentleman.

I have no doubt that the House will rightly and properly continue to consider these matters in the months and years ahead. Because of the detailed effects of the measure and the fundamental implication that it would inevitably result in the break-up of the United Kingdom, I urge the House to reject the Bill.

1.33 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I have great pleasure in supporting the Bill that was so ably and eloquently presented by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell).

The Minister said that he would examine the detail of the Bill and we waited for a rigorous examination of it. When hon. Members who are not here read the debate tomorrow they will agree with us that he scarcely made any dent in these proposals. The Minister must recognise that although the proposals do not amount to a federal settlement for the United Kingdom, because that would involve other parts of the United Kingdom, they face up to the issue of federalism. This is certainly a step down the road towards federalism, which, from reading the Scottish press this week, is the option with the greatest intellectual arguments in its favour. I am sure that, increasingly, it will commend itself in political terms as well.

Mr. Bill Walker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy, which his hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) was not prepared to extend to me when I tried to put this question to him earlier. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that it is viable to suggest that one can introduce a federal structure in a piecemeal manner? Does not the 83 per cent. of the population, who represent those living in England, have some say in whether or not it wants to be part of a federal structure?

Mr. Wallace: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I had said, instead of rehearsing the question that he wanted to ask my hon. and learned Friend, he would have heard that I said that our proposal was a step towards a federal settlement. I said that it was not, in itself, a federal settlement.

Hon. Members should consider what has gone on in Spain since democracy was restored in the aftermath of Franco. Seventeen autonomous provinces, many of which have taken steps towards regionalised self-government at their own pace, have been established. In provinces such as the Basque country and Catalonia a considerable measure of self-government has been achieved. Obviously there are difficulties and no one would suggest that any administrative machinery runs smoothly all the time. However, when my hon. Friends the Members for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and I

[Mr. Wallace]

visited Spain last autumn we found that considerable advantages had been gained, particularly by the business communities of Catalonia and the Basque country.

The Minister suggested that the business community here was apprehensive about our proposal. However, those in the business community should visit Barcelona or Bilbao to see how self-government is working in practice. Many of those companies have obviously already done that because a list of British household-name companies are already making substantial investment in Catalonia and the Basque country. If it is all right for them to invest in self-governing regions in Spain, the Minister owes it to us to tell us why they would be so afraid to invest in a self-governing region within the United Kingdom.

In the past few days, there have been some newspaper reports about certain members of my party who see the broad vision somewhat differently from the overwhelming majority of Scottish Liberal Democrats. However, the Minister did not adequately address the point raised by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East about the considerable number of people, many of them eminent, within the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party who have called for the Government to take active steps immediately towards devolution. They include people such as Brian Meek, the former convenor of Lothian region, Christine Richards, the leader of the Conservative group on Edinburgh district council, Struan Stevenson, the prospective parliamentary candidate for Edinburgh, South and Sir Russell Fairgrieve, the former chairman of the Conservative party in Scotland. They are eminent figures within the Minister's party and the fact that they are calling for the Government to take active steps now is a significant straw in the wind.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not here when I pointed out that when the Scottish Conservative party conference considered devolution it was defeated, according to the press, by some 600 votes to 11 or 12. All those whom the hon. Gentleman identified were part of that 11. There is nothing new in any of their statements. They have not changed their opinion.

Mr. Wallace: I apologise if I got the figure wrong. However, I believe that more than 12 chairmen of Scottish Conservative and Unionist constituency associations have now given some support for change.

The Minister must recognise that the pace of the debate in Scotland has speeded up since the Scottish Liberal Democrats became, in terms of parliamentary seats, the second party in Scotland on 8 November 1991. That change is significant and the Conservative party must address it.

The danger is that the hard-line Unionist attitude—which the Minister presented today and which the Secretary of State loses no opportunity in speeches to present—will lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. The Minister gave an inadequate answer and suggested that if there was a Scottish parliamentary majority in favour of independence, somehow that would be a mandate for independence, whereas he would not accept that if there was a Scottish parliamentary majority for reform of the present system—as there already is—that would merit the present arrangements for the Union between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom being reformed in a way which would lead to greater self-government for the people of Scotland.

I particularly wish to comment on the provisions in the Bill relating to the island areas of Scotland. The House will recall that during the passage of the proposed 1978 legislation, my predecessor, my noble Friend Lord Grimond, proposed an amendment which would have provided for the arrangements for the island areas of Orkney and Shetland to be considered in the scheme of devolution, had that Bill been implemented.

That was supported overwhelmingly in a local referendum in Shetland. But it must be said that in the actual referendum of 1979, the proposals in the 1978 measure were rejected by the voters in both Orkney and Shetland. One must also admit that in many of what one might call the peripheral areas of Scotland—for example, in Highland region—there was a bare majority in favour of the proposals. Although we would argue that a simple majority should have carried the day, I accept that if a scheme did not command widespread support from different parts of Scotland, we needed to come forward with a better system.

In that context, a system of proportional representation, which was missing from the 1978 proposed legislation, is critical. I have made it clear, as have my hon. Friends, that in future we would not support any measure for Scottish home rule that did not contain provisions for PR. In that way, PR can be some assurance, particularly for those who do not live in the central belt, that, unless there is a massive landslide, there is unlikely to be overwhelming dominance by one party which does not command the majority support of the people of Scotland.

Mr. Bowis: As a grandson of Scotland, I am interested in the subject. I find when talking to people in Scotland, particularly in the type of areas about which the hon. Gentleman is talking, and in areas from which my family comes, that they are particularly concerned lest they move from the present position in which they may feel that they are not always heard sufficiently in Westminster, to a position where they will not be heard in Strathclyde or Lothian. How would the hon. Gentleman's PR system, which I gather would ensure political breadth and balance, ensure regional breadth and balance? With a list system, there would be no guarantee that the party list adequately reflected the needs of the Shetlanders and those who live in the borders, in Galloway and elsewhere.

Mr. Wallace: We have said that the list system does not necessarily commend itself to us. A system of single transferable vote, by its nature, concentrates on communities, and schedule 1 sets out in paragraph 18 the principles that would have to be followed in implementing a system of PR. It says that

> "(a) it produces results in which the number of seats for various parties is broadly related to the number of votes cast for them;
> (b) it seeks to achieve equal representation of men and women and fair representation of ethnic and other minority groups;
> (c) it preserves a link between the member and the constituency which that member represents;
> (d) it is as simple as possible;
> (e) it ensures adequate representation of less populous areas."

The last point answers the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Mr. Bowis *rose*——

Mr. Wallace: I have given way generously and I now wish to make progress.

Proportional representation is a key element of the Bill in giving confidence to people who live outside the central belt that there will not be a Strathclyde or Lothian region writ large.

There are specific provisions relating to the status of the islands districts. There has been a change in the attitude of people in the islands regions since the 1979 referendum. That change is not unrelated to the fact that, apart from a two-month period, that time coincides with the Government's term of office. Those people feel that, on a wide range of issues, they have been saddled with legislation that is insensitive not only to Scotland, but to the needs of the islands areas. For example, they did not want the poll tax, but it was foisted on them. They are more likely to obtain sensitive and sympathetic government through a Scottish Parliament dealing with Scotland's domestic affairs.

To their credit, the incoming Conservative Government of 1979 set up the Montgomery committee to look into the structures and powers of the islands authorities. The committee, which reported in 1984, recommended that, wherever possible, those powers should be consolidated, developed and extended. That was a vote of confidence in single-tier islands authority.

The Bill guarantees that the provisions of the Zetland County Council Act 1974 and the Orkney County Council Act 1974—key pieces of private legislation which allowed the islands to develop in response to the challenges of the oil era—will remain in place unless there is majority support through a local referendum for their change. It guarantees that it should be accepted that the islands enjoy special status—not just the Orkney and Shetland islands, but the Western Isles.

The Bill sets out powers that might be taken on by the islands authorities if, and only if, demand is expressed through the ballot box by people in the islands areas for those powers to be transferred. I am thinking of the fisheries management in coastal waters, which is one issue on which there could be more sensitive government in response to the particular needs of the communities where the fishing industry is of such vital importance to the local economy.

Even in my time in the House, measures have been introduced to deal with the needs of the highlands and islands, for example those involving milk quotas. I remember arguing that special arrangements were needed to deal with council houses occupied by teachers who were employed by both the housing and local education authorities. That took a long time; the Government ultimately gave way, but the original Bill should have taken account of the special arrangements needed in the islands.

I am sure that, as the Minister with responsibility for local government finance in Scotland, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will accept without a hint of controversy that the local government finance arrangements for Orkney and the Shetland islands, not to mention the Western Isles, give him a few more headaches than those for other parts of Scotland due to recent events in the Western Isles, the presence of large oil terminals and financial expenditure related to the infrastructure of the other two island groups.

There are many facets—apart from historical and cultural aspects of the islands—that make them that bit different and special. The Bill seeks to establish that that special status should be accorded to the islands. That would go a long way to reassure islanders that, under any Scottish Parliament, they would not be overridden by large labour groups from Strathclyde. In addition, under proportional representation, any Scottish Parliament would have to take proper account of people in all parts of Scotland.

The underlying principle of devolving power and moving towards home rule is that government should be exercised as close to the people as is possible and consistent with good and efficient government. We believe that people who make their own decisions are likely to make better ones. They will undoubtedly make the wrong decisions sometimes, but one could argue that they had a democratic right to do so. They are liable to make the right decision more often than not, as they know the local conditions, sensitivities and needs. That is the fundamental principle to which we as a party strongly subscribe; it is embodied in the Bill. I trust that the House will support the Bill, which was so eloquently introduced by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East.

1.49 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) showed that he wanted me to make a speech of my own by not allowing me to intervene. I wanted properly to debate the details of his Bill and he did not give me the chance, so I have every intention now of drawing attention to those details and to the political scene in Scotland with which the hon. and learned Gentleman suggests his Bill is intended to deal. As I shall show, it fails to do that.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Will my hon. Friend agree that it is a pity that although this debate is graced by the presence of one of the Scottish Labour Whips, it is not, unfortunately, graced by a Scottish shadow Minister from the Labour party?

Mr. Walker: My hon. Friend is correct. The failure of a Labour party Front-Bench spokesman to speak in this debate will not go unnoticed; it is probably due to the differences of views held by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrat party within the constitutional convention. The absence of the Scottish National party clearly shows that it has no desire to participate in debates on the constitution of Scotland.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) mentioned regional self-government in Spain. Of course there are advantages in studying what other countries do, but hon. Members should be very careful about comparisons with countries that have only recently emerged into a democracy which as yet can only be described as skin deep. We wish them well, but in the United Kingdom we have progressively achieved democracy in the Parliaments of Scotland and of England and in the unitary United Kingdom Parliament. That progression has taken place over 1,000 years, so our system is quite different from that of countries that have practised democracy for only a short time.

I, too, have looked at the situation in Spain. Admittedly I was there for other reasons, but I had the chance to see what was going on there. It is not quite the Valhalla that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland suggests.

[Mr. Walker]

Why are we Conservatives unable to support the proposals in the Bill and the proposals of the constitutional convention? The plain fact is that the Conservative party is the party of union. We do not apologise for that: we are proud of it. We cannot support proposals that we judge to be flawed and unworkable. Governments have to try to deliver what they publicly support. One of the advantages of a minority party with little prospect of forming a Government is that, for almost a century, it can peddle its proposals because it knows that it will never be in a position to deliver them.

In any case, the Liberal Democrats' proposals are not, as they claim, for a federal structure. I do not argue with the theory of federation. In theory, it is a viable proposition, but politics is about the art of what is possible, not about what one writes in theory books.

The plain fact is that 83 per cent. of the people living in these islands live in England. Notice that I did not say that they are English, because there are an awful lot of Scots, as well as many others, living in England. That 83 per cent. has made it clear that it will have no truck with federalism, despite having heard it peddled by the Liberals, the Liberal Democrats, the Social Democrats or whatever name they call themselves this week. They have been peddling that policy and philosophy for the best part of this century, but their popular appeal has hardly improved at all. We take no lectures from them on our representation in Scotland. We remind them that we enjoy a greater share of the popular vote in Scotland than they do, and have done so for a long time.

The Liberal Democrats made typical Liberal jibing remarks claiming that the Conservatives could not staff the Scottish Office. That is nonsense. As this is a unitary United Kingdom Parliament, I remind them that while there might be 72 Scottish constituencies, there are 90 Scottish Members of Parliament, so Scots are well represented. Of the Cabinet of 22, five are Scots. As Scots, why should we listen to the rubbish from other parties about how well we are represented? We are representative in this unitary Parliament in a way that the Liberal Democrats envy and would love to be.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Is my hon. Friend aware that people in my constituency of Wanstead and Woodford, which is represented by someone who has seven eighths Scottish blood, would feel sympathetic to the Bill if they thought that it would result in the Scots being less over-represented? There should be 59 constituencies in Scotland, rather than the number that there are.

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, which draws attention to one of the great problems in trying to restrict the debate to Scotland.

If one appeals to the heart and never to the head, it is not difficult to get people to respond. However, when people see the price that has to be paid for what is on offer, that changes. This is why all the proposals for all the different forms of devolution that have been dreamed up lose their attraction once they have been put on the table. That is what happened with the Scottish Constitutional Convention. While it was sitting and deliberating, the press and the media loved its ideas, and there was popular support. Once its deliberations were completed and the proposals could be examined, popular support started to diminish and then it went down with a thud. This is exactly what happened in 1978-79. Tragically, that results in a boomerang upward effect, luckily only temporary, on support for narrow nationalism. Again, as in 1979, that upsurge will be defeated because the Scots recognise the great advantage of the Union.

Any party—this is particularly true of those which expect to form a Government within this unitary Parliament—cannot and should not, for short-term electoral advantage, support proposals that have no prospect of being enacted. That is an important fact. I do not always believe what I read in the Scottish press or in the national press, but even if we were to believe that the Conservative party's reason for not having more representatives from Scottish constituencies in the House is because we have failed to embrace devolution proposals, that should not be used as a stick to batter us with. It is something we should be proud of. We have stood by our values and the truth, as we see it. I believe that we command the high moral ground in Scotland on the issue because we are not prepared to embrace proposals that would put the Union at risk.

Mr. Wallace: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: Unlike the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East, I have always made a practice of giving way in the House to those who wished to intervene. Therefore I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He says that he and his party have stood loyally by their principles. Can he tell me whether it was the principle enunciated by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) in the declaration of Perth, or the principle enunciated by the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) in the speech quoted by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), or the principle enunciated by Lord Home of the Hirsel on the eve of the last referendum, or the principle subsequently enunciated by his right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)? These principles are all somewhat different. I should like to know which principles the hon. Gentleman has loyally stood by.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman has moved me on to the next stage of my speech. The principle that I am dealing with is that if one is to be in government, whatever one supports must be workable, viable and deliverable in this place. One must believe that when one is vetting proposed legislation. If, in the light of examination—this is true of some of the thoughts of members of my own party—we find that it cannot command support in the House, we judge that it cannot be something that we, as a party, can support. That is what Liberal Democrat Members have failed to grasp.

Let me deal with the Scottish Constitutional Convention proposals. They are relevant to the Bill. The principles are the same: can they be delivered and can a Government get them through the House? The Labour party—the major player in the Scottish Constitutional Convention, helped and assisted by its friends in the Liberal Democratic alliance, or whatever they call themselves these days—put forward the Scottish Constitutional Convention's proposals. The Conservative party attacked the proposals and drew attention to how unworkable they were. Any hon. Member who has listened to anything that I have said in the House on these matters will know that I have repeatedly said that they would not get through Parliament. The bottom line for me is whether they would get through Parliament.

I am delighted that the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) have made it quite clear that they would vote against those proposals.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): The hon. Gentleman must realise that the two hon. Members to whom he has just referred will be but two of the 360 or 370 Labour Members of Parliament who are elected at the next general election. The majority view will be for the creation of a Scottish assembly, a Welsh assembly and regional assemblies for the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Walker: Let us look at the opinion polls. Everyone else wishes to draw comfort from them, for some reason. Even if the best opinion polls say that there could be a Labour Government with a majority of 20 or 30 Members, does anyone seriously believe that the hon. Members for Bolsover and for Bradford, South could not get 15 of their colleagues to go with them into the Lobby against such a proposal? We must be realistic. The hon. Gentleman can tell that to the people outside the House, but he cannot tell it to the people inside this House. We know the hon. Members who support the hon. Member for Bolsover. I could add a long list of names, including those of some right hon. Members who expect to be returned to this House and who would not support the proposal.

The Labour party is unlikely to be able to deliver. If a substantial number of Members were unlikely to support such a constitutional change, the Conservative party could not support it; it would be deemed to be unworkable.

That is the price of attempting to win favour for short-term electoral gain. The chips are counted and the chickens come home to roost. The Labour party in Scotland is running around like a lot of headless chicks; it is fascinating to watch. Those of us who have been living dangerously in Scotland for a long time are enjoying its discomfort.

When the Scots are made aware of the price to be paid and of whether the proposals are workable, support for them will inevitably decline, as it did in 1979 and in recent weeks. Sadly, such proposals have always produced a temporary increase in support for separatism.

My hon. Friend the Minister asked what Scottish Members would have to do. I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) in his place, because he has the good fortune, or misfortune, to chair many of our Standing Committee sittings. He knows that the Labour and Conservative parties man the Standing Committees. We carefully study legislation and frequently amend it, as we did with the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill. Our debates are often heated and controversial, which is what Parliament is about.

I represent 2,000 sq miles of rural, mostly highland, Scotland. I can speak on a wide range of matters in Committees, but, more important, I can table questions. The cornerstone of our unwritten constitution is the citizen's right to have wrongs redressed through their Member of Parliament. That is why hon. Members are free to say what they like in this place and ask any questions, provided they fall within the competence of Ministers.

What shall I do in this future Valhalla that the Liberal Democrats propose in the Bill? The Bill provides that the

> "Scots Parliament may make laws for the peace, order and good government of Scotland with respect to the following matters—"

and then there is a huge list covering two pages. But let me deal with the issues about which I am likely to want to ask questions, the first being the administration of social security. The hon. Member for Springburn and I regularly ask questions about matters affecting our constituents, but he would not be able to ask questions about social security matters affecting his constituents because of devolution. The Minister would not be responsible or accountable for that so the hon. Gentleman would not ask his questions.

Mr. Arbuthnot: But the curious thing is that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) would be able to ask questions about social security matters affecting my constituents.

Mr. Wallace: I apologise to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) if he was going to make this point, but, as I discovered recently when tabling social security questions, one cannot put many to the Minister now because they are referred to an executive agency. The hon. Gentleman must also face the fact that in his constituency there would be Members of the Scottish Parliament who would be able to undertake that task on behalf of constituents. The aim of the Bill is good government for Scotland and its people, including the hon. Gentleman's constituents—it is not to provide a work schedule for him.

Mr. Walker: That was a splendid intervention, because it encapsulated what I am trying to say. As I understand it, hon. Members come to the House to ask questions and, we hope, to deal with matters constructively to the benefit of the citizens of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) clearly pinpointed the problem of setting up such a body in isolation—that is the important aspect.

Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour hon. Members and others, whatever they call themselves—the Scottish National party, the absent lot—come here to make points and ask questions about the 83 per cent. of the population with which they are not linked in any way. However, they will have to say—as we can properly say now about council matters—to the people who elected them and who attend their surgeries, "Go and see your councillor." One can imagine the frustration, because we have all experienced the problems of two-tier councils. Most of the poor devils do not know which councillor represents them or who does what.

One can imagine the appalling situation. Euro Members sit in Europe dealing with all the odds and ends, a situation about which the absent lot are perfectly happy —they are keen to give more power to Europe and they want to take away what we have now in the way of care, interest and protection of our constituents in Scotland. Do they really believe that that will provide good, stable government or that it will not increase conflict in different areas?

I deal now with the matters about which I shall always want to ask questions, such as agriculture. Yesterday, with great difficulty, I managed to ask a question, but it was not during agriculture questions because I was not called. I make no complaint about that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but

[Mr. Walker]

I draw attention to the fact that there are other ways to get things done in this place. Is not that the great thing about this Parliament? If one finds that one cannot use one method, there are other routes.

Yesterday I sat through all the agriculture questions. Why did I do that? Because the raspberry farmers of Tayside are facing problems brought about by Community changes. The fact that Commissioner MacSharry and his officials cannot agree on a policy means uncertainty for raspberry farmers. Yesterday I was unable to ask my question during agriculture questions, but the important thing was to get it on the record and to get things moving. I did that by asking a question during business questions. How many of us do that all the time? We can use early-day motions to bring out matters and we can table written questions.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman seems to be advancing an argument against his original premise. He is glorying in the fact that he, as a Member of this Parliament, was able to make inquiries about a matter that was European Community policy. The fact that the hon. Gentleman can ask questions about European Community matters shows the flexibility of our constitution. After the establishment of a Scottish assembly, he would not have a problem about asking questions about what is happening in that tier of government.

Mr. Walker: Sadly for the hon. Gentleman, he has picked on the wrong chap when dealing with Europe. He should know that I resigned recently as a vice-chairman of the party over European matters. I am unhappy that my raspberry farmers are left as the victims of the bureaucratic nonsense and problems of Europe. I make no secret of my views on that. That is why I am a great supporter of this unitary Parliament and of the Union. They work. Instead of undermining my case, the hon. Gentleman has helped to strengthen it and I thank him very much.

Education is listed as an area that will be devolved—although this is not devolution.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: When the hon. Gentleman resigned his post, did he also resign his post as the Scottish Conservative party's defence spokesman? Curiously enough, defence is not one of the items that the Bill proposes to devolve. Why does the Conservative party feel the need to devolve spokesmanship for defence?

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman should know that I did not resign my position as defence spokesman; I have held that position since 1980. I did not resign the post because I believe that the defence of the realm must be kept and controlled by this Parliament.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: By Scots.

Mr. Walker: By this Parliament, not by the Scots. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) wants to know why I hold the job, which seems to be a source of amusement.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Why is there such a job?

Mr. Walker: The reason is that many years ago the Government decided to deploy to Scotland the nuclear deterrent capability, which gave the matter a Scottish dimension. There is no secret and I do not know why the hon. Member for Gordon is so amused. My job in Scotland was to deal with the peace movement. *[Laughter.]* What is so funny? I think that I did that job very effectively.

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a point that my hon. Friend cannot make. I suspect that the job exists because my hon. Friend is very good at it.

Mr. Walker: I was trying to deal with serious matters, not with the frivolous nonsense on the Liberal Democrat Benches.

I especially want to continue to have an input in education. That is also true of the environment. Hundreds of square miles of my constituency are under forestry. Health is even more important. Meigle cottage hospital is under threat. The last thing I want is decision-making on that to be taken away from this Parliament.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Is not it true that in Scotland, there is a very good education system? It has many different traditions and strengths from our system. A Scottish Parliament has not been needed to achieve that over the years.

Mr. Walker: Indeed not. The period at which Scottish education was probably at its best was the latter part of the previous century when it was under this unitary Parliament.

It is obvious that one wants to continue to have an input in health, housing, local government—always controversial—the police, prisons, pollution and regional policy. There is also trade and industry. I make no apology for my interest in the whisky industry. The hon. Member for Springburn and I regularly fight on that industry's behalf, although we are probably the only teetotallers around this place. We do that because we have constituency interests.

Apparently, transport is to be devolved. That is interesting. I wonder how we shall ensure that bus and rail services operate properly. The same is true of water supplies.

I hope that I have shown clearly that, like other attempts at constitutional reform dealt with in isolation, the Bill is unworkable. It is also constitutionally flawed.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) has mentioned me several times.

Mr. Walker: Because the hon. Gentleman is here.

Mr. Martin: Because I am here. The hon. Gentleman will agree, no doubt, that the reason why there is great pressure for constitutional change in Scotland is that the vast majority of Scottish people feel that the Government are neglecting them. With the closure of Ravenscraig, for example, it seemed that the Secretary of State was indifferent to the problems. I have the Adjournment debate today, which is on a closure that has a bearing on railway safety. I shall be raising that because, once again, the Government have appeared indifferent. Every time hon. Members approach the Secretary of State on matters such as education and school and hospital closures, the right hon. Gentleman says that the decisions are management decisions and not directly to do with the Government. It is small wonder, given all the problems that we face north of the border, that there is pressure for change in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman must face the fact that the Government's complacency has led to that desire for change.

Mr. Walker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention. Let us examine the facts. Since May 1979, Scotland has had its old smokestack, labour-intensive industries replaced. They are gone; they have been banished. In their place have come modern, high-technology industry. That, coupled with a flourishing financial and service sector, and linked to a revitalised whisky industry—whose existence the hon. Member for Springburn must acknowledge—has meant that Scotland now exports more per capita than Germany or Japan. No one would deny that there are problems in some sectors and some areas. What I am saying is that the Bill will not change that or address those problems. The changes that have taken place since 1979 have been beneficial to Scotland, as our export performance has shown.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman is misusing the English language in saying that the traditional industries have been replaced by new industries. In fact, speaking from memory, there are now about 105,000 fewer full-time jobs for men in Scotland than there were in 1979. Taking all employment, there are still far fewer jobs in Scotland than there were in 1979. Those jobs have not been replaced: most of them have been lost.

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman accuses me of misusing the English language. I said that our labour-intensive, smokestack industries had been replaced by modern industry. One could use the hon. Gentleman's argument to apply to earlier times, particularly in my constituency, where 80 per cent. of the population used to work on the land. All that changed with the industrial revolution. We live in a world of change and cannot expect people to continue working in the same activities. That change has brought Scotland to a competitive position where the service sector is growing all the time. It is the biggest employer in my constituency. There are more jobs today in my constituency in the service sector than 10 years ago, many more than there were 20 years ago, and the number of such jobs continues to grow. My local newspaper contains many job adverts each week.

The real difficulty about a Bill such as this is that when one talks about giving Scotland more say over its own affairs and a Government in Edinburgh, people will say, "Oh yes, we agree" until one mentions the cost. What is the price that we would have to pay to achieve that?

I hope that I have demonstrated how unstable the political situation in Scotland would be as a result of the division of responsibilities and power. The constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford would find that I could ask questions and, more important, vote on matters affecting them, but that he would be unable to ask questions or to vote on matters affecting my constituency. That is the weakness of the proposal. The Bill is proposing arrangements to deal with the constitution of the United Kingdom in isolation. Indeed, it was admitted earlier that it would be one step towards a federal structure. The only way in which a federal structure could be created would be if it were introduced simultaneously throughout the United Kingdom as a whole and if the whole of the United Kingdom was prepared to accept it, but that is not the position.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that the gainers from the instability to which he rightly refers are bound to be the Scottish National party which, these days, is far more extreme and committed to traditional socialism than even the Scottish Labour party?

Mr. Walker: My hon. Friend pre-empts me. I have just picked up the next page of my notes which deals with that. The tragedy is that the separatists are helped every time proposals such as the constitutional convention and this Bill are introduced, because once they have been debated and examined, they are found to be flawed and, I would say, fraudulent because the proposers know that they cannot deliver. That helps the separatists, the narrow, socialist nationalists in Scotland. Who really believes that Scotland wants to be governed by the narrow, socialist nationalists of west central Scotland—the "red Clydesiders" as they describe themselves in my constituency? Those red Clydesiders wish to embrace the failed policies of eastern Europe, such as nationalisation, which my hon. Friend the Minister mentioned, centralism, Government controls and Government intervention.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): Looking at the recent opinion poll, surely my hon. Friend accepts that nothing is more likely to drive the Scottish people towards the extreme position of independence or separation than for the Government to do what they are doing now, and rigidly to maintain their anti-devolutionary stance? That is what is happening and that is what is splitting the Scottish Conservative party. Many of its leading figures in Scotland disagree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Walker: I would have more respect for my hon. Friend if he had remained in Scotland and fought his corner there—[Hon. Members: "Oh!"] Yes, those of us who are arguing in the House are the ones who have stayed and fought for what we believe in. If my hon. Friend had been in his place earlier, he would have heard me talking about principles, but he was not present, and he is trying to have a go at me without full knowledge of what has been said. I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Bolsover in his place, because, although I do not agree with him, I recognise that he is a man of principle. Principles are often what is missing.

I turn now to what narrow nationalism really means. It means centralism, Government controls and Government intervention and the closure of Scottish defence bases at Pitreavie, Saxa Vord, Lossiemouth, Kinross, Leuchars, Arbroath, Rosyth, Faslane, Coulport, Prestwick, Edzell, Turnhouse, and Almondbank. All those places employ local people and provide jobs on a massive scale, and would be at risk if we were to accept such narrow nationalism.

What about defence-related industries in Scotland? The plain truth is that many of Scotland's industries, Rolls-Royce, British Aerospace and Ferranti, depend on defence orders. Who seriously believes that Yarrow would have an order for three frigates if we had any sort of separatist Scotland?

The Conservative party must introduce proposals for the whole of the United Kingdom and its constitution. This is not the time for me to introduce such proposals. I hope that during the debates that we shall have on the government of Scotland the Chair and the House will give me the opportunity to debate at great length—I will go on at great length because I have a huge——

[Mr. Walker]

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 14 February.

Private Members' Bills

STILL-BIRTH (DEFINITION) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mrs. Rosie Barnes.]*

Committee Friday 14 February.

AMUSEMENT MACHINES (PROTECTION OF CHILDREN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 March.

ESTABLISHED CHURCH BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 February

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [24 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 14 February.

PRE-WIRED PLUGS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Second Reading what day? No day named.

IMPACT OF DISASTERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

SEA FISHERIES (WILDLIFE CONSERVATION) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (SUPPLY OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): With the permission of the Member concerned, Friday 14 February.

CORPORATE SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

EDUCATION (SCHOOL PREMISES) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

ARMED FORCES (LIABILITY FOR INJURY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

CHEQUES BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Read the Third time, and passed.

SEXUAL OFFENCES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 10th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Brooke relating to Northern Ireland (Industrial Relations) and Northern Ireland (Industrial Relations Consequential Amendment) not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first of them; and those Motions may be proceeded with after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 12th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Hunt relating to Local Government Finance (Wales) at Ten o'clock or not more than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first of them, whichever is the later; and those Motions may be proceeded with after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Eastfield Railway Maintenance Depot

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

2.33 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to Mr. Speaker for the opportunity to put this Adjournment debate before the House. I am grateful, too, to the Minister for Public Transport who is here to reply to the debate. I took the liberty yesterday of putting to the Minister the case that I am about to make now, so that there might be a chance of as full an explanation as possible on the proposed closure.

The Eastfield railway locomotive depot is in my constituency, Springburn. It employs 120 highly skilled engineers, fitters and electricians. The depot is sited on the main Glasgow to Edinburgh railway line. Given the recent announcement to build the European freight terminal at Mossend, the men are deeply shocked at the decision to close a maintenance depot with such an excellent reputation. It was felt that with the opening of that terminal more maintenance depots would be needed.

The work force has an excellent record of industrial relations. Many members of staff have received commendations from the British Railways Board. Many of the staff have worked in the industry since they left school and, in some cases, their fathers worked in it before them. In fact, traditionally, people have worked in the railway industries in my constituency for many generations. At one time in Springburn 11,000 people were employed in railway engineering, but I am sad to say that that is not the case now. If the proposed closure goes ahead only one railway facility will be left—the British Rail Maintenance Ltd. depot, formerly the British Rail Engineering Ltd. workshop. However, even that facility has been reduced to a tenth of its original size.

The Minister will be aware of the concern in the railway industry at the decision by British Steel to move its limestone transportation from rail to road. That decision has been taken despite the fact that the Minister has stated that the Government are doing everything that they can to take freight transport from the roads to the railways because of the environmental consequences of such a change. It appears that the Government are a bit half-hearted about getting more freight work for British Rail. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), who is present, would agree that if more and more freight goes off the railways, more and more jobs in railway maintenance will be lost.

The work force wants to know what the future might hold for them. Obviously, their first wish is for the depot to be kept open, but in the event of common sense failing to prevail, what guarantees will be given to them about relocation?

I know that the Minister may not have all the answers today; perhaps he can write to me to let me know whether BR, if it cannot find similar work for that work force, is prepared to retrain and locate within the travel-to-work area? A recent memo issued by the management stated that no new posts would be created at the Ayr, Motherwell or Grangemouth depots. If that is true, how will it be possible to relocate the work force of Eastfield?

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): First, may I say how much I admire the way in which my hon. Friend is putting the case for his constituents? The recent rail crash at Newton has made maintenance a topical issue in terms of British Rail's responsibility. What does my hon. Friend think about the effects of apparent rundown of maintenance facilities given that maintenance is such an important factor in terms of rail safety?

Mr. Martin: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that matter. I shall refer to the Newton railway disaster and to Bellgrove in the context of railway safety.

The Minister will be aware that the terms and conditions of employment in the railway industry stress the importance of relocation and retraining. I hope that he will comment on that issue and that, if he does not have positive answers, we shall hear further from British Rail.

At the best of times redundancy is worrying. In my area it is disastrous, for I represent one of the worst unemployment blackspots in the United Kingdom. Indeed, when the figures were last given, my constituency was number six, near the top of the list of worst unemployment areas. As I say, redundancy is worrying at any time, but it is disastrous at a time of high unemployment and in an area in which there are few jobs to go round.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen referred to safety. Bellgrove railway junction is in my constituency. Some years ago, when the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was Prime Minister, a terrible crash involving fatalities occurred there. It was due to the single junction, which has now been phased out. At that time the right hon. Lady gave me every assurance in the House that railway safety would become a top priority for the Government. Similar comments were made at the time of the Newton railway disaster last summer. That disaster occurred in my hon. Friend's constituency, although one of the drivers who died was a neighbour of mine, as he lived only a few minutes from my home.

Hon. Members are not unused to attending funerals, some of which are sadder than others. I had never attended a sadder gathering than the funeral of the young driver, Mr. Scott, who lived in my area. Not only did his workmates have the harrowing experience of attending his funeral, but within an hour they had to be at the funeral of the other driver.

Evidence showed that railway safety was at fault and that the technology of the single junction was the problem. We are all anxious to see safety standards improved. It would surely be for the advantage of all to keep open a depot such as that about which I am speaking and which has a skilled work force. It seems pointless to make promises about safety if, at the end of the day, we allow a depot such as that to be closed.

My purpose today is not simply to talk about assurances for the men. That is a vital issue and I have made the case for such assurances being given. Everyone in the community wants the depot to be kept open and, in that context, I could not do better than put to the House the points that the chairman of shop stewards, Mr. Larry Kerr, put to me yesterday. I asked him what, if he was in my shoes standing before the House, he would say to hon. Members. He faxed to me the 18 points that he would stress. He stated that there was potential for total maintenance and servicing of class 156-158 and that it was the only

> "location in Scotland (other than BRML) capable of class 08 shunter heavy maintenance lifts . . . the only location in Scotland (other than BRML) capable of locomotive bogie lifting for wheel set and traction motor repairs."

The shop steward said that it was capable

> "of carrying out all modification work presently carried out at RETB . . . and fitting to class 37 locomotives."

He said that the closure of Eastfield would mean that "West Highland" locomotives would have to be maintained at Thornaby in Teesside or at Inverness, and that, in order to be maintained at Inverness or Teesside, the locomotives would pass Eastfield. It is galling for workers if they see work going past them on its way to another depot. I am anything but a nationalist. I despise some elements of nationalism, which almost seem fascist. However, previous debates have shown that all movement of work to south of the border fuels the nationalists' case.

The shop steward said that the depot was capable of fuelling any class of locomotive or multi-unit and was ideally sited on the Glasgow-Edinburgh main line. He said that it contained provision for breakdown recovery, and facilities to cope with disasters. God forbid that such emergencies should occur again, but the Eastfield depot was involved in the Polmont and Bellgrove disasters and the Newton train crash.

The shop steward said that the depot carried out serious collision damage repair that would otherwise have to be done at a main works. He said that it contained a painting facility and was currently working on InterCity locomotives. The depot can carry out locomotive body work refurbishment and is a central location for "booking-on" train crew.

He said that all staff were C1 trained in mechanical-electrical interchange. He said that the depot had potential for locomotive power unit changes, and maintained line-clearing snow ploughs. He said that it was recognised by senior technical and engineering management as an essential facility, the work of which could not be easily or reliably taken over by other depots.

The shop steward's report said that the complex comprised:

> "(a) 12 covered repair roads
> (b) of which 5 have overhead cranes
> (c) 2 heavy repair . . . roads
> (d) fuelling/servicing roads
> (e) 2 covered roads capable of accepting complete 156 or 158 trains sets for repair
> (f) recently upgraded safety systems".

The depot is in the process of applying for BS 5750 standard. It has an excellent industrial record.

The shop steward stated that the depot had the potential

> "to carry out any sort of British Rail work, perhaps under the proposed T and RS grades restructuring."

That was the case set up by the shop steward. I am sure that my hon. Friends the Members for Rutherglen and for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) will agree with that case. They both have constituents who work in the depot, and I am sure that they would agree that it would be a loss not only for Glasgow, Springburn, but for railway engineering throughout Scotland were the depot to close.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): As my hon. Friend knows, the Glasgow to Ayrshire line and the Glasgow to Gourock and Greenock line run through my constituency. Anyone who knows of the great knowledge and expertise that have been built up at the Eastfield depot will agree that to lose that depot would be disastrous for Scotland.

Mr. Martin: I thank my hon. Friend for that point.

I plead with the Minister to use whatever influence he has to call on British Rail to think again about the Eastfield railway depot.

2.49 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): With characteristic courtesy, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) informed me yesterday of a letter that he had received from Mr. Lawrence Kerr of the works committee. I have read that letter; it was helpful to be briefed on some of the points that the hon. Gentleman wanted to raise. If I cannot answer all his points in the remaining time, I will write to him.

There is no difference between the hon. Member for Springburn and myself in wanting to pay tribute to the skill of the men at the maintenance depot. They have a creditable record and it is right that we should record their hard work and skill in helping British Rail to achieve the status of one of the best maintained railways in the world.

The Eastfield depot is situated two miles north of Glasgow Queen Street station, on the main line from Glasgow to Edinburgh. It has been the main heavy locomotive maintenance depot for Scotland for many years. Its role has been diminishing in recent years, largely because of changes in British Rail's fleet composition. In 1986 the diesel locomotive fleet in Scotland stood at 235. Now it stands at 98, with further reductions forecast as new electric trains and smaller and more powerful diesel locomotives are introduced.

One advantage of the modernisation of the passenger fleet over the past few years has been the reduction in maintenance costs. Less work is now needed to maintain the fleet. Modern sprinter trains, including class 158s, have been introduced, replacing locomotive-hauled services and older multiple units. On the freight side, the introduction of new heavy-haul diesel class 60 locomotives has both reduced the number of locomotives requiring maintenance and the amount of maintenance needed by those that remain.

Another contributory factor has been a decline in freight flows, mainly relating to the past rundown of steel-making facilities in Scotland. The closure of Eastfield depot therefore also reflects a reduction in the requirements for locomotive maintenance for the railway's freight business in Scotland.

I understand that BR has had Eastfield's position under review for some time and that last year it looked at a number of options for the future of the depot. As part of that review, all BR businesses were consulted but no prospect of alternative extra work for Eastfield emerged. After careful consideration of long-term requirements, BR came to the conclusion that closure was the most cost-effective solution.

This is purely a business decision by British Rail, not one for Ministers. The hon. Member has raised a number of detailed points concerning the views of the work force, but I must stress that the day-to-day management of the railway and the deployment of railway staff are entirely matters for the British Railways Board. I can, however, tell the hon. Gentleman that having read the detailed letter, I will correspond with the chairman of British Rail, Sir Bob Reid, and send him the letter to make absolutely certain that all the points made by the works committee are understood and taken into account in BR's decisions.

I understand that the depot will probably close later this year. The exact date will be set by BR after consultation with the work force and BR's freight customers in Scotland. About 120 staff will be affected by the closure. BR has said that it will do its best to avoid compulsory redundancies and will make every effort to provide alternative jobs, retraining within the railway industry and relocation assistance if required. Advice and counselling are, I understand, now being made available.

It is the intention of British Rail to keep as much work as possible in Scotland—at the depots at Motherwell, Ayr, Grangemouth and Inverness, for instance. Some heavy maintenance will have to go to Immingham on south Humberside and Thornaby on Teesside.

In addition to ensuring that the chairman of British Rail sees the letter from the works committee, I will take a personal interest in events as they unfold to ascertain what British Rail is doing to avoid compulsory redundancies, to institute retraining, and to help with relocation, including financial assistance when appropriate. I will take a personal interest and I will ask the chairman of British Rail to inform me of progress so that Ministers are aware of what is happening.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I am heartened by the Minister's assurances, which I am sure will be appreciated by the work force. There is also a worry about what will happen to the land. The Minister may not be able to give me an answer now, but perhaps he could write to me.

Mr. Freeman: I was aware of that concern. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about that.

It may be helpful if I comment briefly on the two points that the hon. Gentleman raised—the consequences for freight business in Scotland and rail safety. I do not believe that the closure of Eastfield will affect the ability of British Rail's freight business to move new freight traffic in Scotland. The closure of Eastfield will reduce the cost of providing a freight service to Scotland and so make British Rail's freight operations more efficient. The Government believe firmly that the rail freight industry should operate without subsidy. In order to attract more business away from the road and on to the rail, it must operate in an efficient a manner as possible. The managers of rail freight distribution and bulk train load freight must make sure that the maintenance facilities that they have are not only commensurate with the business that they are doing but are run as efficiently as possible.

Nor do we believe that closure will affect the establishment of the intermodal channel tunnel terminal at Mossend, which will enable business throughout Scotland to take full advantage of the rail freight services that will be available between Scotland and the continent. The situation at Eastfield needs to be seen against the wider background of British Rail's investments in Scotland. The channel tunnel terminal at Mossend is a joint venture between BR, AMEC Regeneration Ltd. and the Lanarkshire development agency. Total investment in the fully developed site, including the construction and equipping of the terminal, will be in excess of £250 million.

[Mr. Freeman]

This new development will have the potential capacity to generate up to 8,000 jobs, and is expected to handle 400,000 tonnes of intermodal freight traffic annually.

There has been some speculation that the decision to close Eastfield depot was taken so as to utilise the land for other developments. I must emphasise that the closure of the depot results solely from an excess of maintenance capacity. This must be cut if the freight businesses are to remain competitive. It is too early to say what subsequent use will be made of the land. It is intended that some accommodation on the site, outside the depot buildings, will be used by BR administrative and technical staff to support the remaining engineering activities in Scotland. However, I will make further inquiries, write to the hon. Gentleman and keep him abreast of the developments on the land.

I am well aware of the concern felt by hon. Members about single-lead junctions at Bellgrove and Newton. An inquiry on Newton is under way and the inspector has not yet concluded and prepared a detailed report for the Secretary of State. I can give the House an assurance that any recommendations from the inquiry will be acted upon. The Department of Transport does not believe that British Rail has neglected its responsibilities for running a safe railway. This year, it will spend £200 million on safety—a substantial increase on last year and the year before. I share the hon. Gentleman's view that a safe railway, which means safely maintained rolling stock, is essential for the good operation of the railway.

Although closure of the depot is a matter for British Rail and not Ministers, it is related to the capacity of maintenance facilities, not just in Scotland but throughout the country. I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that I will draw the letter prepared by the convenor or chairman of the works committee to the chairman of British Rail, so that it is aware of all the various factors that have been cited. I will take a personal interest in how the staff at the works are treated—there is a difference between the salaried and works grades. There may not be many opportunities for those on salaries at some of the other sites in Scotland. They might have to look further afield within British Rail. There may well be opportunities, however, for those on wages. I hope that compulsory redundancies will be avoided. I know that British Rail will try very hard to ensure that that is the case.

I also gave the hon. Gentleman an assurance about the land. There is concern about what might happen to the facility, if it is closed, as is the intention. I shall keep the hon. Gentleman informed.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 10 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Marine Safety

1. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to improve marine safety, particularly so far as fishing boat losses are concerned.

The Minister for Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): The United Kingdom has developed domestic legislation and regularly consults the fishing industry safety group about possible improvements. I expect shortly to receive reports from the marine accident investigation branch of a number of recent fishing vessel accidents. They will be studied carefully and I can assure the House that any necessary measures that are brought to our attention will be given very careful consideration.

Mr. Harris: I welcome that assurance, but does my hon. Friend accept that there is already a tremendous amount of evidence about some of the things that are clearly wrong with maritime safety? Is he aware that I have been carrying out my own investigations, including a trip through the channel? I have received a number of letters on the subject, and most people who are knowledgeable about the subject tell me—and I am sure that they are right—that the root cause is bad watchkeeping, mainly by merchant vessels but also occasionally by fishermen. Will my hon. Friend try to bring both sides together nationally—as is happening locally in Devon and Cornwall—to try to make some progress on this central issue, as well as pursuing the matter internationally?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful for the constructive way in which my hon. Friend is addressing the problem. He rightly draws attention to the fact that it is not necessarily always one side that sometimes breaches the watchkeeping agreements and regulations. We want to consider those matters, and I shall certainly bear my hon. Friend's points in mind. I am about to meet him to discuss his recent trip and see whether any lessons can be learnt from it.

Dr. Godman: I know that the Minister has no direct responsibility for Ministry of Defence vessels sailing too close to fishing vessels, but may I remind him that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) and I raised with the Ministry of Defence the recent incident in which a nuclear submarine surfaced within 1,000 yd of a fishing vessel, despite the promises given in the aftermath of the sinking of the Antares? Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that it is time that we ensured that no United Kingdom registered vessel puts out to sea without carrying on board immersion suits for each and every crew member?

Mr. McLoughlin: As I have said to the hon. Gentleman on a number of occasions, the matter is being evaluated and examined. I do not think that immersion suits are necessarily the answer to all the problems to which the hon. Gentleman referred—indeed, they could create mobility problems for fishermen on board vessels. I understand that the Ministry of Defence is renewing guidance to commanders of submarines in transit and exercise areas.

Mr. Wolfson: On the wider issue of marine safety generally, is the Minister fully satisfied with the safety of the older types of roll on/roll off ferry?

Mr. McLoughlin: We need to ensure that all ferries come up to the standards expected under the safety of life at sea conventions.

Ms. Walley: Does the Minister agree that we return to the whole issue of ship safety at every Question Time, and that the only difference between this time and last time is that we now have recourse to information from the National Audit Office, which confirms many of the concerns which we have been expressing about ship safety, especially as it affects fishing vessels? Does the Minister agree that the time has come to take responsibility for inspections away from the Department of Transport and to place it with an independent body in which we can have confidence—the Health and Safety Executive? Is not that the only way to learn the lessons of all the tragedies that we have experienced?

Mr. McLoughlin: It is certainly true that the National Audit Office report was interesting. It was compiled largely with the help of the surveyor general's department which repeated a number of points and the NAO went through its files and noted them. We will respond in due course to the NAO report. However, it is worth quoting *Lloyd's List*, which does not always say how virtuous the Department of Transport is. It states:

> "But after reading the NAO report, it would be hard to get oneself worked up into a lather about either marine safety, or the Department of Transport's handling of it. One hopes that this does not promote complacency."

It will not.

Rail Services (North-west)

2. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will next meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the future development of rail services in the north-west region.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and I regularly meet the chairman to discuss current issues. I attended a meeting on 9 December last year of the north-west local authorities to discuss transport issues in the north-west.

Mr. McCartney: Will the Minister of State confirm today the Government's unwillingness to provide the £800 million necessary to upgrade the north-west main line link to ensure through trains to the channel tunnel and the continent, as requested by business men in the north-west?

If he can confirm that, is he prepared to allow British Rail an arrangement similar to that agreed last December with the TGV for a leasing arrangement so that British Rail can get on with upgrading track and machinery to ensure that the north-west can take advantage of the channel tunnel link?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that all three types of channel tunnel trains have been ordered—the inter-capital trains between London, Paris and Brussels; the night trains that will run up through the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and the day trains north of London. They are being purchased for cash——

Mr. Prescott: They are leased.

Mr. Freeman: That is because the purchase is being made with other countries. British Rail is leasing the deep-sea container wagons.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I am delighted to know how many trains have been ordered. However, it seems to me sometimes that discussions with British Rail are like the chicken-and-egg when it comes to places like Lancaster. British Rail wants us to prove that there are passengers before the trains are run. How on earth can we plan ahead if we do not know whether trains will be there? I hope that BR will have a little faith in the rapidly expanding business in the north-west—we are doing remarkably well up there—and show that faith by allowing more trains to stop at Lancaster.

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend will know that BR has plans to re-equip the InterCity service on the west coast main line. I am sure that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) on the Opposition Front Bench would share the view that InterCity services are commercial and should remain unsubsidised.

Mr. Fearn: When the Minister next meets the chairman of British Rail, will he discuss the fact that BR is about to reduce the InterCity service by 30 per cent? Cutting the trains by 30 per cent. will have a disastrous effect on the north-west. Does he agree that industry, and in particular the tourist industry, will suffer if that happens? Does he also agree that the resort of Southport along with Preston and Liverpool may suffer because of that?

Mr. Freeman: The exact timing of InterCity services is a matter for BR and not for Ministers. However, BR's investment programme under this Government has been significant. Investment is up 85 per cent. BR's investment programme is the highest for 30 years. Under Labour, BR's investment fell between 1964 and 1970 and rose by only a very small percentage between 1974 and 1979.

Mr. Burt: Will my hon. Friend congratulate all those involved with the east Lancashire railway which, with the help of £1 million worth of derelict land grant from the Government, recently concluded a deal with BR to ensure a link between its own successful enterprise and the main rail network? With the anticipated completion of the metro light rapid transit link to Bury, does he agree that the future for rail lovers and rail transport services in my constituency is very good indeed?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Government have provided section 56 grant and credit approval cover to the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority for completion of the Manchester metrolink. That is solid evidence of the Government's support for urban transport schemes.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister aware that unless the Government take action before the general election it is likely that France will have a very large transit point on its side of the channel while on the British side there will be very little planning either for modernised rail services from London to the north-west or around London, which is vital for the north-west? If there is even further privatisation, the north-west will be left with an inferior service and very little advantage to the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail's plans for channel tunnel services when they open in late summer of next year are totally financed and well advanced. If the hon. Lady's colleagues were to form the Government after the next election, the first step that they would take would be to postpone the decision on the channel tunnel rail link by setting up a commission to take six months to review a decision that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has already taken.

Airline Passengers' Compensation

3. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will introduce measures to require the Civil Aviation Authority to pay compensation for airline passengers whose planes are delayed for over 10 minutes after the scheduled arrival time as a result of delays caused by air traffic control.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Steen: What about the airlines? Should not they get compensation if planes are delayed because of the restrictive practices of air traffic controllers? Is not one way to get a greater quantity and quality of slots to separate the Civil Aviation Authority from National Air Traffic Services and make it an independent public utility, thereby separating the poacher-cum gamekeeper role of the Civil Aviation Authority, much as the National Rivers Authority and the water authorities are separate? Would not that be a better solution for the customer—the airline passenger—and for the airlines themselves?

Mr. Rifkind: On the first part of my hon. Friend's question, obviously when aircraft are late there can be a number of reasons. It may, for example, be the action of air traffic controllers overseas that resulted in the late departure of an aircraft, for which air traffic control authorities in this country could hardly be held responsible.

On the latter part of my hon. Friend's question, when the Monopolies and Mergers Commission last commented on this matter, it suggested that at some stage a review would be appropriate to look at the future combination of the Civil Aviation Authority with National Air Traffic Services. We will at some stage wish to consider that matter, but I should not like to comment on the issues at the moment. That are complex and they would need to be examined very carefully before any view could be properly expressed.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Secretary of State aware that, in 1990, at Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Luton airports, more than 26 million passengers arrived more than 15 minutes late? If the Secretary of State were even to consider paying a small compensation of £10, it would be the equivalent of £250 million, doubling the CAA's debt to the Government—that is, its borrowing requirement. Do the Government accept some responsibility in this matter, because they laid down the corporate plan in 1983 that instructed the CAA to reduce the number of air traffic controllers by more than 100 or 8 per cent., which has contributed to those people arriving late at our airports?

Mr. Rifkind: It was not clear from the hon. Gentleman's remarks whether he was pledging a future Labour Government to impose such a financial obligation on the Civil Aviation Authority. I note that he is rather coy about giving his view on that matter. He should be aware that the air traffic control system in the United Kingdom not only has the best record in Europe but has available to it massive investment which will lead to a substantial increase in the available capacity. The requirements of the Civil Aviation Authority with regard to new investment have indeed been fully met by the present Government.

Mr. Soames: While I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the plans for increased spending on air traffic control in this country, is satisfied with the political control of Eurocontrol? Is he able to tell the House when that is liable to come on stream, bearing in mind that that excellent plan will make a great difference to the convenience and safety of the travelling public?

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who raises an important matter. Of course, at a European level it is desirable to achieve better harmonisation and co-ordination of air traffic control. However, I should warn the House that I do not believe that it is appropriate to try to move towards a single air traffic control organisation. There have been too many examples of poor industrial relations, especially in France, which have led to all air traffic being cancelled. I should not like those matters to be in the control of a small number of people, who could switch off air traffic throughout Europe because of some industrial dispute. Our air traffic controllers have a superb record of service to the country. We want better harmonisation and co-ordination, but not a single uniform organisation.

Rev. Martin Smyth: We appreciate the Secretary of State's responses, but I am a little concerned that he is still thinking of considering that in the future. There are still too many delayed flights, especially from Scotland and Northern Ireland, because—we are told—of air traffic control delays. May I press the Minister to reconsider the issue—or is there a cosy relationship between the airlines and some hotels, to try to get us to stay overnight in London?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman raises a legitimate point. It was precisely because of the undoubted congestion at Heathrow and, to a lesser extent, at Gatwick that some years ago the Government approved major investment for the CAA. Steps which are currently under way and the new investment which is being provided will in the near future allow for a substantial increase in overall air capacity in the south-east, which will help to relieve that type of congestion, to the benefit of the travelling public.

Mr. Adley: In rejecting the suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), has my right hon. and learned Friend borne in mind the repercussions of the reasons that he gave for his rejection a moment ago—that someone else might be responsible? Bearing in mind that the proposals in the citizens charter for British Rail could also be subject to the same propositions—perhaps a suicide on the line or a hoax telephone call—how confident is my right hon. and learned Friend that the citizens charter will provide cast iron guidelines which will not end up in a lawyers' paradise?

Mr. Rifkind: I have always made it clear that British Rail is entitled, and indeed correct, to point out that late arrivals of trains can be due to acts of vandalism or other acts beyond its control. That is being taken into account in the preparations for the passengers charter by British Rail.

Highways (Newcastle upon Tyne)

4. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the size and scope of the 1992-93 major highway programme in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): The size and scope of the 1992-93 major highway progamme in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne are matters for the city council.

Mr. Cousins: The Minister well knows that the package that Newcastle put up is good for jobs and good for people. Why then did he not give the money to enable the scheme that local people had worked out for Cradlewell in Newcastle to go ahead? There are would have been no dizzy walkways, no murky subways. An urban village centre would have been created next to a local beauty spot, preventing an important local historic monument—the Armstrong bridge—from falling down. Why did the Minister specifically pull out the money for that scheme from Newcastle's road programme?

Mr. Chope: Because the city of Newcastle council asked us to. Last year we substituted the Scotswood road improvement for the Cradlewell bypass scheme. That was supported by the city council. The hon. Gentleman referred to the need for jobs and prosperity in Newcastle. The best way to bring those about is to ensure first-class road communications to Newcastle. His party is proposing to put in jeopardy our upgrading of the A1 to motorway standard.

Mr. Amos: Does my hon. Friend accept that since 1979 the Government have spent and planned to spend nearly £600 million on road construction and maintenance in the north-east? The north-east has done very well out of the Government, although we need to dual the A69 west of Hexham. Does he not accept that the demands of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) for more road building sit oddly with those of his Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who would put a moratorium on all new road building?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government are committed to further investment in the road infrastructure in the north-east. Indeed, we have a trans-Pennine study on links between the north-east and north-west. The outcome of that study will inform further investment decisions in the future.

Bedfordshire County Council

5. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to meet Bedfordshire county council to discuss the future development of transport in the county; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I met representatives of Bedfordshire county council on 29 January to discuss proposals for the future use of the Luton to Dunstable corridor.

Mr. Madel: My hon. Friend will be aware that great progress has been made on bypass construction since 1979. Will my hon. Friend's Department give full support to keeping the Bedford to Bletchley line open, reopening the Luton to Dunstable line and to creating a new terminus south of Luton so that Bedfordshire can benefit when the channel tunnel is opened?

Mr. Freeman: First, I know of no plans to close the Bedford to Bletchley line. The rolling stock is aging, and British Rail is considering the introduction of modern rolling stock on that line. My hon. Friend has been assiduous in promoting a scheme to reuse the Luton-Dunstable line and I very much hope that that scheme comes to fruition. A diesel shuttle service from Luton to Dunstable would run on a track that is currently not used and that service would bring great benefits. As to the channel tunnel terminal, British Rail has no plans to have other than King's Cross as its London terminus. Services on the midlands and the east coast main lines would depend upon electrification, but I know that British Rail will seriously consider running channel tunnel services when there is proper demand.

Uninsured Drivers

6. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's estimate of the number of uninsured drivers.

Mr. Chope: In 1989 there were 208,010 convictions in England and Wales for uninsured driving. It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the total number of offences committed.

Mr. French: Is my hon. Friend aware that the failure of some motorists to have any insurance cover results in higher premiums being paid by other motorists who abide by the law? Does he agree that the compulsory display of insurance discs on vehicle windscreens would help to reduce evasion in this country, as it has done in others?

Mr. Chope: Certainly, driving without insurance is a serious offence and others end up having to pay for the wrong-doers. That is why the Government have increased, by legislation, the maximum penalty from £1,000 to £5,000. The courts can also order disqualification. My hon. Friend's suggestion might result in less evasion, but there are 140,000 convictions each year for failing to display the road fund licence. If we proceed along the lines my hon. Friend suggests we would need the support and encouragement of the insurance industry. I intend to meet representatives of that industry to discuss my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Mr. Gregory: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he assure the House that he will have urgent discussions with the Lord Chancellor not only about the derisory fines that magistrates can impose, but about the fact that, in the past two years, many magistrates, not least in York, have never imposed the maximum fine on those who have been caught for not insuring their vehicles? Such an urgent meeting is called for, if we are to have safety on the roads.

Mr. Chope: There are regular meetings between my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor and the Magistrates Association. The subject could be brought up at the next meeting.

MV Derbyshire

7. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representation and correspondence he has received from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers on the sinking of MV Derbyshire.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have received two written representations from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers on the sinking of MV Derbyshire. I will be responding to those representations shortly.

Mr. Loyden: The Minister will be aware that the information gathered by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers confirmed the long-held view that there is a structural fault in the design of bulk carriers? Is he aware that the lives of more than 300 seafarers have been lost in the past two years because of the loss of 21 bulk carriers? When will the Government face up to their responsibility? How many more lives will be lost before the Government recognise that the Secretary of State should use his discretionary powers to reopen an inquiry into the Derbyshire and the wider implications of its loss?

Mr. McLoughlin: Structural failure was fully investigated and examined by the formal investigation which was ordered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. The formal investigation for which the hon. Gentleman is pressing has been held, but, because he is unhappy with the answers that that inquiry came up with, he wants another.

Liverpool Street-Chelmsford Rail Service

8. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will pay an official visit to Chelmsford using the rail service provided from Liverpool Street station to Chelmsford.

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend will recall that I visited Chelmsford with him just over a year ago. The line to Chelmsford is benefiting from a continuing programme of investment which has recently included new trains and the splendid refurbishment of Liverpool Street station. Future investment will include major resignalling works, including works in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. My constituents welcome the fact that £1 million a day is being invested in Network SouthEast, but they are still concerned about the punctuality and cleanliness of trains. Will my hon. Friend use his influence to ensure that the citizens charter allows compensation for rail users who do not get a good service, apart from when vandals or adverse weather conditions affect that service? So far, British Rail has not been capable of issuing its own scheme, and getting compensation out of British Rail is like getting blood out of a stone.

Mr. Freeman: I can confirm that British Rail will publish its rail passengers charter shortly. Performance targets will be set for all 15 Network SouthEast lines, including the Great Eastern line, and those targets include punctuality and reliability. Although a comprehensive scheme of compensation will be set up, I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that the targets should be there primarily as an incentive to British Rail to perform well, given the investment that it has made, rather than to provide, automatically and at great cost, compensation to passengers, particularly as the money would have to come out of British Rail's pocket.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister remember the Adjournment debate on 7 June last year, when I pointed out that at the key junction of Stratford, at this very line, it is not just Great Eastern that will be responsible for the trains? There will also be the north-west region of Network SouthEast, Regional Railways, InterCity, Train Load Freight, Freightliner, International Ferry and Freight, the docklands light railway and London Underground. At the moment, there are also plans, through crossrail, to have trains coming from the Thames valley, the Chilterns and the channel tunnel. Will not all these profit centres and ownerships of coaches and wagons mean that even the fattest of fat controllers will not be able to sort out the quarrels over profits and that these bodies will be quarrelling all the way to Marsham street?

Mr. Freeman: I do not share the hon. Gentleman's pessimism. He did not mention what will be possibly the most important project over the next few years to affect Stratford—the Jubilee line. I hope that the relevant Bill will receive approval in another place shortly and then Royal Assent. Stratford will indeed be an important terminal, but British Rail has plans to modernise the station and in the 21st century it will become one of the most important rail terminals in western Europe.

British Rail (Labour Statistics)

9. **Mr David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were employed by British Rail in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1991.

Mr. Rifkind: The total number of British Railway Board employees at 31 March 1991 was 136,277. The number employed at 31 March 1979 was 244,084.

Mr. Evans: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his reply. Does he agree that greater efficiency and more taxpayers' money still produce a rotten service? When will the taxpayer and the paying public get better value for that money? When will the Secretary of State sack the chairman of British Rail and his management for incompetence? The nation wants to know and, frankly, so do I.

Mr. Rifkind: British Rail has improved the quality of its performance over the years in many ways, but at the same time other parts of the railway network require considerable further improvement. I have full confidence in Sir Bob Reid as chairman of British Rail. He has an enormously difficult task to do, to turn around an organisation that, over the years, has been bureaucratic and not sufficiently sensitive to the needs of the travelling public. The reforms that he has introduced and the further reforms that the Government will bring forward will transform our railways. I am delighted that, even in recent years, it has been possible to say, once again, that the railways of the United Kingdom are expanding, contrary to the experience under a Labour Government.

Mr. Snape: Does the Minister accept that the figures that he has given to the incoherent hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) amount to a reduction in staff of 28 per cent? The key factor on which he should concentrate is that British Rail's external financing limit has been reduced under this Administration by 32 per cent. since 1979. The only area in which there has been an increase since the Conservatives were elected, other than productivity is that of fares, where there has been an increase in real terms of 18 per cent. I ask the Secretary of State to assure the House that he has no plans to offer the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield a job as a station announcer at any railway station in the area which I represent.

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about investment in our railways, he will hear today, and again and again, the following figures. Between 1951 and 1964, under a Conservative Government, rail investment increased by 29 per cent. Between 1964 and 1970, under a Labour Government it fell by 57 per cent. Between 1970 and 1974, under a Conservative Government, it rose by 48 per cent. Between 1974 and 1979, under a Labour Government it rose by only 13 per cent. Under this Government it has risen by no less than 85 per cent.

Citizens Charter

10. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement as to the effect of the citizens charter on British Rail's operations.

Mr. Freeman: The citizens charter is about raising standards and making public services more responsive to their customers. The British Rail passengers charter will set out a number of initiatives to give greater impetus to the efforts that BR has already made in this direction.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: For passengers from Carlisle to London, is not the reality of the passengers charter likely to be that rail fares will increase, that journeys set out on the timetable will be cancelled and that some journeys will be lengthened, all this being part of a desperate attempt by British Rail to claw back the £40 million that they will probably need to pay compensation to passengers? Given the way that the charter has been presented to Parliament, is not it a political gimick?

Mr. Freeman: As for £40 million, that is the hon. Gentleman's figure. British Rail paid out between £6 million and £7 million last year in compensation. We have no plans to be associated with any scheme that involves significant costs. That would not be sensible. It is sensible to have performance targets that British Rail will strive to meet, and there will be proper compensation where those targets are not met. The hon. Gentleman adopts a negative approach to improving the quality of service that is provided by British Rail. Indeed, there have been no positive proposals from the Opposition about improving the quality of British Rail services.

Mr. Butler: Is not it indicative of British Rail's problem of being too producer-oriented that it confronts the problem of compensation by floating the idea that it will have to increase fares rather than increase efficiency?

Mr. Freeman: Quite right. We want British Rail to take very much further some of the initiatives on which it has already embarked in trying to be more responsive to customer demand. It should be not a producer or engineer-led industry but one that is responsive to what passengers want in terms of price and time of service.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Minister aware that British Rail's charter was promised by the Prime Minister in August for December, and that it is now two months late? The Government are hardly setting a good example for British Rail. Will he confirm that the definition of lateness adopted by British Rail and the Government, which was changed from five minutes to 10 minutes in the 1980s, is already being considered and that compensation will be paid only to those whose trains are over one hour late? As the Government have made it clear that compensation will be available only to season ticket holders and those who book their seats, six out of 10 passengers on a train will have no entitlement to compensation. That shows that there will be first-class and second-class compensation schemes. Surely it would have been better to use the compensation moneys—the Government have pinched another idea of ours, leasing trains—and lease the 40-year-old north Kent trains, it being clear that the passengers prefer a new and reliable train rather than being paid compensation

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman has not read the charter, so I am not sure how he can criticise it. The reason that the Government, together with British Rail, have taken great trouble over the passengers charter—and why, therefore, it is later than originally forecast—is that it is now better than was forecast in the White Paper last summer. The hon. Gentleman should wait and see what it says.

On leasing, BR has been leasing wagons, locomotives and other services for years, and where it is appropriate it will continue to do so.

Red Routes

11. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the public response to his recently announced Londonwide red route consultation proposals.

Mr. Rifkind: I announced my proposals for the composition of the red route network in London on 22 January and will be considering the responses I receive by 31 March.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the pilot scheme has been a spectacular success, with about a one third reduction in the number of accidents on the red routes compared with a 12 per cent. average reduction for Greater London? Will he assure us that he will stick robustly to the outline suggestions in the consultation paper? Will he think about the continuing problem, however, of parking abuse by private motorists on the red routes? Those cars must be clamped quickly to deter their owners from parking there.

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend, in particular about enforcement of the red routes being crucial to their success. My hon. Friend was right to refer to the enormous improvement in safety on the red routes. During the pilot scheme, there was a fall in the number of personal injury accidents of 33 per cent., at a time when accidents elsewhere in London had also fallen, but by only 10 per cent. It is clear that the red routes are making a significant contribution to saving lives and to preventing serious injuries.

Ms. Ruddock: Did not the Secretary of State say that red routes would not encourage cars, but would help buses, lorries and the environment? How does he explain that the pilot scheme results show an 11 per cent. decrease in the number of heavy goods vehicles, but an overall increase in traffic of 11 per cent? There was no decrease in local traffic. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that, in his proposed 300 miles of network, 30 per cent. will have no local bus services and that the Government do not intend to make any new money available for the essential traffic-calming and safety measures that need to be implemented with the red routes?

Do not the results of the pilot scheme guarantee a hostile reaction to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's consultation document, as exemplified by the Tory council of Kingston upon Thames, whose committee chairman said that the red routes were wholly inappropriate to local traffic problems? Will not——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please be brief.

Ms. Ruddock: Will the Secretary of State now abandon that failed experiment and adopt Labour's policy, which is to turn red routes into green routes, where buses and the environment will truly have priority?

Mr. Rifkind: I have no intention of abandoning a policy which is already saving lives and preventing people, including children, from being injured. The hon. Lady was wrong in what she said, because the evidence suggests that more people are travelling by bus and that there has been an increase on certain routes. In addition, bus journeys are being completed considerably more quickly than before. The hon. Lady's facts are based on a misunderstanding of the position.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Prosecution Policy (Burglary)

31. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Attorney-General when he next intends to meet the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss prosecution policy in the case of burglary.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I am pleased to have appointed an excellent new Director of Public Prosecutions. The Crown prosecution service policies are regularly reviewed, but it is too soon to fix an agenda for our first meeting.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why is it that the thief Mr. David Clare, who stole thousands of pounds worth of equipment from offices in the House of Commons, was not prosecuted? Is not it true that the police caution procedure used in that case means that that person will not have a publicly available criminal record? Is that the position?

The Attorney-General: The decision to caution Mr. Clare was taken by the Metropolitan police in the exercise of its discretion. That practice has long existed as an alternative to taking criminal proceedings. The advice of the CPS was not sought and I do not know what it would have been. It is worth commenting that the CPS, in its evidence to the Royal Commission on criminal justice, proposed that the caution procedure be placed on a statutory basis.

Mr. John Morris: Will the Attorney-General convey our good wishes to the new Director of Public Prosecutions, who is a lady with energy and independence of thought? Will he assure the House that some lessons have been learnt from the time-consuming process of her appointment, in respect of her successor? Will the new Director of Public Prosecutions be able to take up her post meantime?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's welcome to Mrs. Mills, which I will gladly convey to her. I thought it right that there should be an open advertisement and an open competition for that very important job, and that process proceeded as fast as possible. Mrs. Mills will remain in charge of the Serious Fraud Office until her successor in that post is appointed and that, too, will proceed as fast as possible. I hope very much that a successor will be in place by the end of March.

Royal Commission on Criminal Justice

32. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has plans to submit further evidence to the Royal Commission on criminal justice.

The Attorney-General: I have no plans to submit further evidence to the Royal Commission on criminal justice.

Mr. Mullin: I read the Attorney-General's very modest submission on a very narrow point and also the evidence given by the police and the Home Office to the royal commission, and was left with the impression that the royal commission had been established because of public concern that too many guilty people were walking free. Does the Attorney-General, with his long experience, have any thoughts about what it is that is wrong with the legal system that led to the miscarriages of justice that have occurred? If so, does he have any suggestions for doing anything?

The Attorney-General: I, too, read my modest submission to the royal commission again this afternoon. I thought that it was rather good, so perhaps it was not as modest as all that.

The guidelines laid down by my predecessor for the disclosure of unused material in the possession of the prosecution have been greatly extended by recent case law. However, they remain uncertain—or perhaps they remain in consequence uncertain. I proposed to the royal commission that they should have a statutory basis, because there is uncertainty as to what constitutes the prosecution in that context and as to what constitutes unused material, and about a number of other matters. The hon. Gentleman invites me to embark on a debate on which you, Mr. Speaker, would not be terribly keen—even though I have already lost two of the 10 minutes in which, every three weeks, I am entitled to stretch my gauzy wings.

Mr. Fraser: The Attorney-General knows that the royal commission is willing to consider remunerating legal aid practitioners in magistrates courts to avoid miscarriages of justice. Why does not the Attorney-General submit that issue to the royal commission?

The Attorney-General: The royal commission has rather a lot on its plate already.

Mr. Skinner: Fly

The Attorney-General: I am anxious that the royal commission should not only fly but arrive, and in reasonable time.

Marquis de Sade

33. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *269*, how many representations he has received concerning the publication of further works of the Marquis de Sade in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Since 23 January, I have received two letters on the topic of "Juliette" from hon. Members, but none relating to any other work by the same author.

Mr. Hind: Will my right hon. and learned Friend look again at the book "Juliette"? As a member of the Bar myself, I found it difficult to understand why a book that combines the subjects of heterosexual activity with those of children, torture and violence is not considered obscene. If my right hon. and learned Friend wants an independent but much cheaper legal opinion than that which he is receiving from the Crown prosecution service, I shall be more than willing to provide him with one—to prosecute Arrow Books for publishing that work.

The Solicitor-General: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that offer. The Director of Public Prosecutions' decision was taken after careful consideration and with the benefit of advice of junior and senior Treasury counsel of great experience. In their view, on all the evidence—including that relating to the statutory defences, but not confined to them—there is insufficient evidence to offer a realistic prospect of conviction.

Mr. Cormack: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that most of us who have looked at this thing find it absolutely incomprehensible that the book has not been the subject of a prosecution? If the director's decision is correct, does not my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the law needs re-examining?

The Solicitor-General: That is not a matter for me, but it may assist my hon. Friend to know that a number of successful prosecutions are brought every month under the legislation in relation to the type of material that is more normally associated with the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

Lord Chancellor's Department (Staffing)

34. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Attorney-General what are the implications for the level of staffing of the Lord Chancellor's Department after 1 April of the transfer of responsibilities in relation to finance, organisation and management of the magistrates courts.

The Solicitor-General: About 50 staff will transfer from the Home Office to the Lord Chancellor's Department following the forthcoming transfer of responsibilities in relation to the magistrates courts which will take place on 1 April.

Mr. Dalyell: To allow those concerned to "stretch their gauzy wings", will the extra Minister involved help them to make up their minds about whether the Solicitor-General and the Attorney-General are on the side of the senior officials of the Home Office and the Metropolitan police? Some of us are very concerned about Mrs. Stella Rimington's efforts to expand into entirely new areas, which have hitherto been the responsibility of the Home Office and the police—very sensitive areas of investigation for MI5. Should not Parliament know more about a lady who really was the sub-puppet mistress in relation to many of the evil things that happened, via the security forces, during the miners' strike?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman has expanded his question a good deal beyond its original ambit. Whatever the answer to that interesting point, it is unlikely that the work of the magistrates court will be stretched very much.

Mr. Burns: Following the changes that will take place on 1 April, will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that any proposals to reorganise the magistrates courts are given careful consideration, so that certain schemes do not proceed—in particular, crackpot schemes such as the proposal to move the magistrates courts out of Chelmsford, the county town of Essex, and up the road? That would cause my constituents great inconvenience and difficulties.

The Solicitor-General: I know that my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor regards the local connection for magistrates as a very important element of their extremely important jurisdiction.

Serious Fraud Office

35. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to widen the remit of the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to my Questions; I thought that I must have hurt his feelings last time. The statutory remit of the Serious Fraud Office is to investigate and prosecute suspected offences involving serious complex fraud. I do not consider any revision necessary.

Mr. Skinner: The reason why we have not been in combat is that the Table Office has not been placing my questions high enough on the Order Paper.

Will the Attorney-General have a look at the questions that have arisen over what has been revealed during the past two weeks about the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), who was chairman of the Maxwell Communication Corporation for two months and picked up £300,000 in shares, a £100,000 handshake and a Mercedes for a quid? Given the call for others to tighten their belts, should not the matter be investigated? Will the Attorney-General look into it?

The Attorney-General: I shall assume in the hon. Gentleman's favour, but without much confidence, that he gave my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester notice of that question.

If any conduct by anyone in the country—no matter who that person is—is thought to give rise to the possibility of a criminal offence, it is the duty of whoever makes such an assertion to report that conduct to the police. It is not a matter for the Serious Fraud Office. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that he has got something, he should report it to the police. If he has not got anything, I hope that he will not raise the matter again in the House of Commons, where privilege operates.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Elephant Conservation Schemes

39. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what elephant conservation schemes are currently being funded by his Department.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): Since 1990, the Overseas Development Administration has committed almost £20 million to wildlife conservation projects in Africa, many of which contribute directly or indirectly to elephant conservation. A list of projects is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Will he take this opportunity to restate the Government's continuing support for a continuing ban on the international sale of elephant ivory? Is he aware that Botswana, which receives considerable amounts from his Department in respect of wildlife conservation, is planning to set up an elephant processing factory near the Chobe national park? Is he aware that Botswana's deputy director of wildlife, Mr. Niger Hunter, advocates the sale of elephant ivory? Mr. Hunter occupies a post which is funded by the Department. Should not that be stopped now?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government remain fully committed to maintaining the current ban as long as it is necessary to secure the revival and recovery of the African elephant populations. The Convention on Trade in Endangered Species panel experts will be reporting on proposals that countries such as Botswana have submitted. We shall have to consider the panel's reports, but I cannot anticipate our position on reports that are not yet available.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend give examples of ways in which British financial aid helps to save elephants and other endangered species, bearing in mind the very great importance of the question raised by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes. Of course the Government have a comprehensive wildlife conservation support programme in Africa. We support 27 wildlife projects in eight countries. Since 1990, that has amounted to £20 million worth of assistance to wildlife conservation.

Disaster Relief Unit

40. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the present complement of the disaster relief unit in his Department.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The current complement of the emergency aid department is 12½.

Mr. Barnes: During the initial crisis when the Kurds fled into the mountains, followed by the crisis in the western Sahara and Bangladesh, the numbers in the disaster relief unit were slowly increased, following questions that were asked by my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench, from four to six, then to nine and then to 12. The figure now seems to be 12½ persons, according to the Minister's answer. That unit was sorely pressed. It worked beyond the call of duty with inadequate resources and lack of personnel. Has anything been learnt from those disasters so that the unit can be given the resources, personnel and status that it requires?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: That organisation is now called the emergency aid department and comprises the disaster and refugee unit. The figures are broadly as the hon. Gentleman suggested. Since last year they have been maintained at the level of 12, or 12½. It is important, as every non-governmental organisation would testify, that administration of aid is kept to the minimum. What is important is not a heavyweight bureaucracy at home but the amount of money that is put into the aid itself.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the amount of money available for disaster relief has been doubled and that, unlike some other countries, we are able to get relief on to the ground very quickly indeed, because the bureaucratic delays have just been swept away?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes. For example, the Overseas Development Administration's work in northern Iraq was widely praised by the international community. We have committed £139 million of humanitarian aid this financial year, against the original provision of £75 million.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On the question of disaster relief for the Kurds, what action are the Government taking to break the economic embargo that has been imposed by Saddam Hussein on the Kurdish communities of northern Iraq? To what extent are the British Government involved in the initiatives being taken by the American Government, which were reported extensively in the American and the British media last weekend?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Security Council resolution 688 demanded that Iraq should end its repression against the civilian population of Iraq. We have warned the Iraqi Government that violation of the resolution would have serious consequences. It is not appropriate, however, for me to comment on intelligence matters, but we should certainly shed no tears if Saddam fell.

Sri Lanka (Ministerial Visit)

41. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Sri Lanka to discuss overseas aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None, Sir.

Mr. Cox: Is the Minister aware that that is a very regrettable answer? Is he aware of the urgent need for aid to Sri Lanka, but aid that is based on the upholding of human rights in that country? If no visit is proposed, will the Minister make clear to the Sri Lankan Government the deep concern of many hon. Members about the rights of the Tamil community, and most especially that we should be given assurances that food and medical supplies reach the Tamil areas in Sri Lanka, particularly in the Jaffna area?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes; on many, many occasions we have made known our concerns about the Tamil people. Of course we have not cut off, or completely frozen, all aid. However, we withdrew the conditional offer of £3 million worth of aid last July in order to emphasise our concern about human rights. Indeed, we imposed various measures on the Sri Lankan Government as a result of the high commissioner's expulsion last year.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in many cases people in other countries would not have so much need of aid if they were to stop fighting each other? The great problem about overseas aid is that those countries that receive it often use it to buy arms with which their peoples kill each other.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Of course I accept my hon. Friend's point that if there were no conflict there would be less need for aid. However, it would be going too far to suggest that the poorest countries in the world will not always need aid.

Voluntary Agencies

42. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with voluntary agencies on the role of voluntary agencies in aid matters in the last four weeks.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the last four weeks my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has met with voluntary agencies on five occasions. I have had two such meetings.

Mr. Eastham: Is the Minister satisfied that, with regard to these agencies, we are doing enough? Is not it a fact that there is a critical feeling that we in the United Kingdom could do far more to help some of those voluntary agencies to provide assistance in the third world?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I think that, with seven meetings between Ministers and the voluntary agencies in the last month, we have shown our great commitment to the work that the agencies do. Of course we recognise the terrific help that they provide within our aid programme. In particular, they are able to help the poorest in many countries in a way that is not always possible with Government-to-Government aid.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: May I ask my hon. Friend whether, in addition to the party-political election arguments about overseas aid, we shall, if we win the election, have discussions with the voluntary organisations? Would not it be possible to set a timetable to achieve at least a halving of the gap between our present official aid levels and the United Nations target, to whose attainment, at some unspecified time in the future, we are committed?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The 1991-92 aid budget is 10 per cent. more in cash terms, and 3 per cent. more in real terms, than that for the last year. We shall, of course, continue our discussion with the voluntary agencies and the non-governmental organisations. Indeed, a very important fact is that the theme for the United Kingdom presidency of the European Community will be the promotion of the voluntary agencies. At the moment a great deal of work and discussion is being undertaken on that initiative.

Kenya

43. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about future levels of aid to Kenya.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our gross bilateral aid programme in 1990—the last year for which figures are available—was £44 million. The future programme will depend on further political and economic reform.

Mr. Hain: Why have not the British Government been much tougher with regard to the provision of aid—as the Americans and some of our European partners have been—to ensure that the democratic changes in Kenya towards the first free, multi-party elections genuinely take root, to ensure that there is a fair system of voter registration and an independent electoral commission and to ensure that there are international observers from the United Nations or the Commonwealth? Surely the British Government must insist upon these points as a condition of the provision of future aid?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are not out of line with other donors. All donors have agreed that new pledges of balance of payments support should await further economic and political reform. But, as is only right, we are continuing project and technical assistance activities to help the poor. I can accept a good deal of what the hon. Gentleman says about how the election should be conducted. Of course there must be free and fair elections. I only wish that the hon. Gentleman had taken the opportunity to make those points to the Kenyan Foreign Minister. An appointment was arranged for him when he was in Kenya last December.

Motorway Service Areas

3.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Government's future policy on the provision of motorway services.

Development of the motorway network over the past 30 or so years has brought significant benefits to motorists. Those benefits have been seen most recently in the opening of the final sections of the M25, M40 and M20, and will continue in future with the completion of other motorway projects, such as the upgrading to motorway standard of the A1 between the M25 and Tyneside and the A74 from Glasgow to Carlisle.

Motorway service areas in England have been centrally planned and controlled since the inception of the motorway network. That approach has produced a standardised pattern of relatively large service areas at intervals of about 30 miles operated by very few catering companies. Provision of MSAs—motorway service areas—has failed to keep pace with the development of new motorways. Most notably, there are at present no services on the 200-mile motorway route between Folkestone and Birmingham.

We announced in the citizens charter that a complete reform in the current arrangements was necessary. I am today publishing a consultation document which proposes a new way forward. The aim is for more MSAs where they are necessary and a better choice. A copy of the consultation document has been placed in the Library. It has been widely circulated among existing and prospective operators, local planning authorities, and motorists' and consumer organisations. It invites comments by 20 March on the application of the proposed policy in Scotland and Wales, as in England.

The main feature of our proposals is that the Department of Transport should no longer decide the location of MSAs and should no longer own MSA sites. In future, sites would be identified and acquired by private initiative in the same way as are other desirable developments.

In seeking generally to reduce bureaucratic involvement in the provision of motorway service areas, I am consulting on the degree of deregulation to be adopted. There are two broad options. Under the first, my Department would continue to require that certain minimum standards should continue to be met in order to ensure certain facilities that the market might not otherwise provide. Examples might be minimum hours of opening—whether 24 hours or less; or a requirement that a certain number of parking places for lorries should be available; or a requirement that lavatories, telephones and parking should be freely accessible to the public. That list is not exhaustive. Such requirements could be enforced by way of a combination of planning conditions and the Department's control of access to and signing from the motorway. That is very similar to the system that has been followed successfully in Wales where there are, at present, five MSAs—including one under construction—on the 75 or so miles of the M4 in Wales.

Under the second option my Department would go further and withdraw from all controls over what was provided at MSAs. Its only concerns would be to ensure that the access arrangements proposed were safe and that arrangements had been made for the developer to meet the cost of any highway improvements required. We would also expect, under this option, to allow the operators of suitable off-line sites, as well as those on the motorway, to seek signing. The number and frequency of MSAs, and the level and range of services that each provided, would be decided by the market, as with other developments. That would lead to the greatest possible diversity and competition and so would offer the motorist the widest choice.

Under either option, developers would require planning permission in the normal way. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will issue planning policy guidance to local authorities on the factors bearing on consideration of proposed motorway services developments. Also, to protect the efficiency of motorways as high-speed through-routes for long distance traffic, a general prohibition on new MSA accesses at less than 10-mile intervals is proposed. That is less than the current assumption of 30 miles and may lead to proposals for smaller MSAs which would be more environmentally acceptable. The new arrangements that we propose will have implications for existing MSAs. They will also affect schemes which my Department has in the pipeline.

For the 44 existing MSAs in England, I propose, unless I am persuaded otherwise after consultation, that the Department should dispose of its leases to existing operators, enabling them to compete on equal terms with new facilities brought forward under the new deregulated regime.

Some new sites in the pipeline are well advanced and will be taken forward under broadly the existing arrangements. This will be the quickest way of providing these much-needed services. On other stretches of motorway, although the Department has done preliminary work in planning for services, we will now expect the private sector to take the opportunity to fill the gaps.

The proposals that I am launching today flow from commitments made in the citizens charter. We said then that our aim was to improve the rate of provision and number of MSAs, and so enhance consumer choice. I am convinced that this can best be achieved by lifting Government regulation and encouraging private enterprise into this important market.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): This is yet another statement in the continuing public relations rhetoric concerning the citizens charter and is intended to produce motorway service stations which, on some stretches of motorway such as the M40, are clearly needed because none presently exists.

The statement is also born out of the Prime Minister's experience at the Happy Eater some months ago when he decided to demand more service stations such as the Happy Eater and instructed the Secretary of State for Transport to provide plans for them. As I understand it, the Secretary of State provided the plan, but it was vetoed by his colleague the Secretary of State for the Environment on planning grounds. Once again, he overruled the Department of Transport on transport matters. The statement represents a further victory over transport for the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The matter is to be dealt with in a review, and as the review will be completed by 20 March, I as the Secretary

[Mr. John Prescott]

of State will not accept—*[Interruption.]*—I will not accept the proposals which are a licence to the developers to exploit the green belt.

Does the Secretary of State accept that the provision of motorway stations through a deregulated system will mean handing over control to the developers—with planning decisions and the passing of hundreds of thousands of pounds to influence those planning decisions—and will produce a number of empty sites where service stations are found to be commercially viable, as we witness with petrol stations? There will be massive development sites in our most attractive green belt areas, and that concerns many people.

Will the Secretary of State assure the House, under whatever system he considers, that the increasing practice, especially of the Happy Eaters, to deny large lorries access to their sites and to the refreshment facilities necessary for tired drivers will not continue and that minimum standards will include good standards for our heavy vehicles?

In this review, will the Secretary of State consider the other citizens charter promise to reduce the number of cones on our motorways in light of the report by the Select Committee on Transport that the number of cones on our motorways can be expected to double in the next two years due to the lack of maintenance of our road programme?

The statement represents a complete handing-over of development rights to the developers for the exploitation of the beautiful areas around our motorways. I assure the House that, as next Secretary of State, I will not allow that to take place.

Mr. Rifkind: I was delighted to see that the hon. Gentleman was so unconvinced by his picture of himself as the next Secretary of State that he could not present the proposal with a straight face. We all share his merriment in contemplating that matter.

I was greatly interested by the hon. Gentleman's denunciation of our proposals for deregulation which, he said, represent a hand-over of the public interest to the developers. Is he suggesting, therefore, that the system that has existed in Wales for a number of years has been anything other than a success? Is he suggesting that the future Labour Government in which he proposes to have such an important and honourable position will reverse the situation in Wales? Does he not realise that the Welsh experience is worth following?

When the hon. Gentleman said that the Department of the Environment was unhappy with our proposals, he introduced the realm of fantasy into the issue because his comment bears no relation to the events. No such veto took place at any time. He is living in a world of his own.

The hon. Gentleman asked about cones on motorways. As part of the citizens charter proposals, the lane rental scheme, which is leading to significant reductions in the use of cones, is being extended to 60 per cent. of all motorway contracts. In one respect, the hon. Gentleman's policy would lead to the use of fewer cones because he does not propose to build any more motorways; no doubt fewer cones would be part of the consequence of his policy.

The hon. Gentleman appears to be complacent about the existing arrangements, which have led to insufficient motorway service areas, and he has not identified one respect in which a Labour Government would find alternative means of ensuring that motorists received the services to which they were entitled.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members will see from the Order Paper that we have a busy day ahead of us. I shall allow questions on the statement to continue for 30 minutes, then we must move on. If questions are brief, I shall be able to call all those hon. Members who have been rising.

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): Will my right hon. and learned Friend convey to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment the great undesirability of building motorway service areas in places such as Stokenchurch, on the M40, given that long discussions have already proved conclusively that undesirability?

Mr. Rifkind: It is accepted that, under any scheme, it is necessary for applicants to seek planning permission and, obviously, the Secretary of State for the Environment takes the ultimate decision on the planning aspects of any proposal, which is only right and proper.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): We welcome the statement because we feel that smaller units have been needed for a long time and now we are to get them. The Secretary of State mentioned 20 March. That allows a very short time——

Mr. Prescott: He will not be in office after that.

Mr. Fearn: Perhaps so. That seems to be a very short time to allow for negotiations between consumer organisations and others, and those who own the motorway stations.

What will happen about signposting? People will be turning off motorways to smaller units and may well find that they provide only eating places and lavatories but no petrol. That is most important. Women driving on their own will have certain reservations about turning off to small units—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about safety measures here—if they are not sure of getting petrol there.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for our proposals. Smaller motorway service areas will be less environmentally controversial and will be more likely to be acceptable to the public as a whole as well as to motorists. The smaller service areas will almost invariably provide petrol for the driver: after all, that will be their main raison d'etre and source of income. If a motorway service area did not provide the full range of services, it would be appropriate for that to be indicated on the signs so that motorists would be aware of the services that they could expect to find.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that two welcome conclusions might be drawn from his statement? If the conditions that he now suggests had applied, we should not have had to wait 16 years, with still not a sod turned towards the first motorway service area on the M11, and market-driven operators would be more likely to produce smaller, more environmentally friendly schemes than that imposed by his Department upon my constituents at Birchanger.

Mr. Rifkind: Part of the thinking behind the proposals is that, the fewer motorway service areas there are, the larger the projects are likely to be, and in the past that has inevitably led to some very controversial proposals which have been strongly resisted in various localities. I believe that it is now a more commonly held view that the proposals that we are advancing are likely to be more environmentally acceptable.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Does the Secretary of State accept that some of us were surprised at the way in which he extolled the virtues of service areas along the M4? Does he remember that, until 1991, there was not a single service station between the Aust services near the Severn bridge—which is in England—and the Sarn services near Bridgend, well over 40 miles away, and that, for the first five years of its life, when one reached the Sarn services, one found that the only places for eating and drinking were Nissen huts scattered on a muddy patch? I hope that the wonderful service areas that he has just announced will not be like that for the first five years of their life.

Mr. Rifkind: The Welsh experience appears to be that, within the 75 miles of motorway, four motorway service areas are already available and a fifth is being made available at the moment. That is an important achievement and it shows that the approach being pursued in that part of the country appears to have been more able than that applied elsewhere at providing the services that motorists require.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Will my right hon. and learned Friend take a little time to study the service area at Tebay on the M6 in my constituency? After the big groups expressed no interest in the 1960s, a local group developed motorway services there. As a result, that service area now employs more than 150 people, almost exactly the same number that Tebay used to employ on the railways during the golden days of the railways. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment sends his circular to planning authorities, will my right hon. and learned Friend ask him to draw to their attention the dramatic effect on local employment that service areas can have in upland areas of low population where jobs are not very plentiful?

Mr. Rifkind: I applaud what has been achieved in the Tebay service area; and my right hon. Friend is right to say that lessons from that experience may be learned in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Department of Transport is to blame for the lack of services on the M11? Will service stations be built on green belt land? If they are, he will find that a series of beefburger bills on the motorway will not be very appetising for motorists.

Mr. Rifkind: The normal planning rules will apply for any proposal affecting the green belt, and that is very important. The main reasons for delays have been, in part, the public inquiries required for planning applications, the disputes in respect of compulsory purchase powers sought by the Department and a number of fruitless legal challenges to the way in which the Department carried out its responsibilities. At least two of those three causes of delay would no longer apply under the proposals that I have outlined today.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the news about deregulation will be warmly greeted in Toddington service station on the M1, one of the oldest service stations in the country and one of the busiest, on the basis that the new opportunity will increase jobs in the area? Will he say something about access to motorway service stations and whether he might relax the rule that they can be approached only from the motorway itself, because there could be opportunities for further development behind stations for sporting and leisure facilities for people who are not necessarily travelling on the motorway?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome for the proposals. The prime function and raison d'etre of motorway service areas has been the provision of services to the travelling public. We would be reluctant to encourage large amounts of traffic to seek access to a motorway service area as that might result in additional congestion. However, each proposal must be considered on its own merit to discover whether there are particular circumstances which might justify departing from that general approach.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It is a nightmare scenario to imagine the country up to its ears in citizens charters with wall-to-wall Happy Eaters. Did I gather from what the Secretary of State said that local authorities will be required to give the initial planning consent, not his Department? Will he tell us how many new outlets he envisages being in situ in the next five years —assuming, of course, that the new Labour Secretary of State does not end the scheme?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman added a rather important qualification at the end of his question. The normal planning rules continue to apply. Therefore, any application for a motorway service area must go to the planning authorities and follow the normal planning procedures. That side does not change. The change is the ending of disputes with regard to the compulsory purchase powers sought by the Department and the various unsuccessful legal challenges which have delayed progress enormously in some projects.

It would be contrary to the philosophy behind my statement for me to indicate the number of motorway service areas. That will be determined in the light of the needs of motorists as identified by the potential developers of those motorway service areas.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): In freeing up refreshment areas along motorways, will my right hon. and learned Friend give added impetus to the private building of motorways and indeed even the installation of toll gates on motorways that already exist, such as the M40, which is ideally suited to that?

Mr. Rifkind: We have no proposals to introduce tolls on existing motorways. We have been prepared to consider the private financing of certain new road projects, of which the Birmingham northern relief road is the most important to come forward so far.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): With the deregulation of motorway service areas, and with the opening up to private enterprise and competition, may I have an absolute assurance from the Secretary of State that there are no plans to allow service areas to sell alcohol in any form?

Mr. Rifkind: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. We have no intention of relaxing the ban on alcohol at all motorway service areas, either now or in the future.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is a tremendous problem at the Charnock Richard service station in my constituency regarding access to and exit from it by traffic that is not on the motorway? Does he accept that there is a tremendous need for direct access? Service area operators want direct access in terms of sales of goods and petrol. Contrary to what my right hon. and learned Friend said to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), such access would ease congestion, particularly on minor roads. Will my right hon. and learned Friend look most carefully at that important point?

Mr. Rifkind: I shall certainly do so. I tried to acknowledge to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) that alternative access to a motorway service area might be appropriate in some circumstances. Clearly, their primary purpose is to serve users of the motorway, but if local circumstances justify additional access without causing congestion or road safety problems, it would obviously be perverse to prevent that if no difficulties were caused by a provision of that kind.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Secretary of State list the four sites of what he has described as the four operating centres in Wales? As his statement, like most of the citizens charter, is hype and transparent general election propaganda, will today's statement be financed by Conservative central office?

Mr. Rifkind: I cannot understand the hon. Gentleman's final comment. Either he believes that it is desirable to have easier and quicker provision of motorway service areas for the needs of the travelling motorist or he does not. I should have thought that his own constituents would see it as a desirable announcement because it is likely to provide the facilities that the motorist so anxiously needs. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the Labour party does not believe that, for example, for the 200 miles between Folkestone and Birmingham there should continue to be no motorway service areas? Is that what the hon. Gentleman is seeking to suggest to his constituents?

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): While I welcome freeing up the development of motorway service stations, does my right hon and learned Friend agree that it is absolutely essential at this early stage in the debate to make the point that, so far, the development of petrol stations along normal roads in this country has been visually very obtrusive and unattractive? Does he also agree that, when new stations are being developed on motorways, it is vital that the planning authorities place heavy emphasis on making them environmentally superior to what was built before?

Mr. Rifkind: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. There are one or two motorway services which make a contribution to improving the landscape of the locality, but that is the exception and not the rule. It should be possible, with a combination of sensitive design and good architectural thought, to bring forward developments that not only meet the needs of the motorist but do so in a way that is sympathetic to the environment in which such facilities are to be found.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Minister for Roads and Traffic, who is sitting next to the Secretary of State, will recollect that on 5 February he sent me a courteous and considered response to a six-page, tightly argued article by Professor James Horne, professor of psychophysiology at Loughborough, who has studied microsleep and the phenomenon of driving without awareness. Does the Secretary of State accept that those are very important matters for driving on motorways, particularly on motorways such as the M9, which he and I know well? What conclusions for both those studies and indeed the studies of driver behaviour that his Department set in train in 1986 are to be used in relation to making motorway service areas better from the point of view of traffic accidents, very often late at night?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Precisely those considerations lead to the need for easy availability of motorway service areas. Sometimes drivers are driving for many hours and for long distances on the motorways. It is important that they should not be required to leave the motorway to have a short rest or get refreshment. Unfortunately, that has been a necessity in some parts of the country. The proposals have been brought forward to deal with that sort of problem.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his statement will be welcomed by my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) and by people in my constituency who have fought strongly against the Department of Transport's proposal to build a 50-acre service station at Arley, in Cheshire, which is in the middle of the green belt? Could he give an assurance that any scheme put forward by the private sector would tend to be in a more environmentally friendly site and would not be of such a monstrous size?

Mr. Rifkind: Clearly, any proposal which might be put forward by the private sector would have to be subject to all the rigours of the planning system and would be tested against proper criteria. It is likely that in future proposals will be for developments of a more modest size. As a result of that change, at least some of the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend and other hon. Members are less likely to occur.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): As my right hon. and learned Friend may know, I am a regular user of the M40 and I look forward immensely to some form of relief coming to the motorist during the next few months. Can my right hon. and learned Friend say whether any developer who might wish to invest in a motorway rest area be obliged to develop on both sides of the motorway? I can foresee the opportunity to develop a small, modest site on just one side which would be attractive to the motor car user without having to indulge in the huge expenditure necessary to develop an exact replica on the other side.

Mr. Rifkind: There are already some examples of motorway service areas on one side of the road only. Inherent in the proposals for greater flexibility is the assumption that there may be proposals of the kind that my hon. Friend referred to, which may make sense and may therefore be more easily acceptable to the local community than a proposal with more serious environmental implications because of its sheer scale. Flexibility is inherent in our approach and therefore I am happy to respond positively to my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. Bob. Dunn (Dartford): If the proposals put forward by the Secretary of State today lead to the introduction of discreetly fashioned motorway service areas along the southbound carriageway of the M25, I shall welcome them. Will he confirm that the introduction of more competition into the provision of motorway service areas will lead to better quality service and lower prices for the consumer? My constituents, like his, probably object to being ripped off by the very high prices charged by some providers.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, there has been concern among many motorists who feel that inadequate choice is available to them. To provide that choice also requires the provision of the relevant information for the motorist on the motorway determining which service area to use, who should be aware of the differing facilities which might be available and of the cost likely to be inherent in them. I believe that our approach will be more likely to meet the objectives that my hon. Friend has rightly referred to.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, as I have to drive home 250 miles every Thursday night to my constituency, I would appreciate greatly if more facilities were available? Will he ensure that every motorway service station, however small, has facilities for disabled people? That is an absolute must, wherever they may be. Does he not think that it is a remarkable reflection on the Labour party's cavalier attitude to keeping promises that the shadow Secretary of State for Transport finds it reprehensible that we should be keeping ours?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the needs of the disabled. It would be highly desirable that all motorway service areas should have proper facilities to meet the requirements of persons in that category.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): If my right hon. and learned Friend thinks it desirable, may I press him to consult the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee which hopes to persuade him that it is essential for every motorway service area to have facilities for disabled people?

Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept the point made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who spoke for the Opposition, that cars are profitable for motorway service area operators but that lorries are unprofitable? A power of direction will be necessary because lorry drivers are required to stop and if they do not find provision on the motorway they will go off them, which in itself is undesirable.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, during consultation, people may wish to consider the contrast in the flows of traffic on the M4 in Wales and those, for example, on the M1 and the M25? Does he accept that the citizens charter means that citizens may lose £10 million for each service area on motorways where the operators are in competition and bidding up? It is likely that that competition will upset people in every thicket, field and green-belt area, where it is difficult to get permission to build a road in the first place. That is likely to cause more rather than less trouble for Members of Parliament.

Mr. Rifkind: I do not agree with my hon. Friend's final observation. However, his earlier remarks are highly relevant because the document offers two possible options for different degrees of future involvement by the Department of Transport. I am anxious to hear comments on whether 24-hour access, free lavatories and so on should be available at every motorway service area or whether their provision should be subject to the proposals of the developer and influenced by normal planning criteria only. Important consequences follow, depending on the option chosen. I want to hear comments about that from the public and from interested parties before reaching a conclusion.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

AGRICULTURE

That the draft Farm Woodland Premium Scheme 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Offshore Safety Bill [*Lords*]

Order for Second Reading read.

4.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The principal purpose of the Bill is to enable many of the recommendations of Lord Cullen's report into the Piper Alpha disaster to be implemented. The events of the evening of 6 July 1988 led to an explosion and fire resulting in the deaths of 167 men. The disaster was the most serious in the history of offshore development. It was a dreadful reminder that safety can never be taken for granted. We must never forget the tragedy and distress that it brought to the families of those who died or were injured, to all the survivors and to those who took part in the rescue operation. Every possible step must be taken to prevent such a tragedy in the future.

A week later, Lord Cullen was appointed to lead a public inquiry to establish the circumstances and cause of the disaster. The inquiry also examined what could be done to prevent similar disasters. It was extensive and thorough, taking more than two years to complete.

The report was published in November 1990. It was an outstanding piece of work. I add my personal tribute to the many already paid to Lord Cullen by those involved in the offshore industry and many others. The fact that the Government immediately accepted all 106 recommendations in his report is a tribute to its breadth and quality and reflects the seriousness with which we take these matters. The offshore industry also accepted the report in its entirety.

Since the report into the Piper Alpha disaster was published, a great deal has already been done to implement the report's recommendations. I shall refer to three matters by way of illustration of progress so far.

First, on 1 April last year, responsibility for offshore safety was transferred to me from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. This responsibility is administered on my behalf by the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive. The transfer was agreed on the basis of extra staff and resources for the enforcement of offshore safety legislation. In addition to this, the Government have increased the resources available to the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive to finance their other tasks arising from Lord Cullen's recommendations. The total resources allocated for offshore safety in 1991-92 are £20 million, an increase of some £8 million from the previous year. This budget will rise progressively to £35 million by 1994-95. As stated in the explanatory and financial memorandum, none of the Bill's provisions involves any additional resources in itself, because the transfer of responsibility for offshore safety has already taken place by administrative means.

That increase in resources will allow for a fourfold increase in the number of Health and Safety Executive people working on offshore safety. Of course, new recruits will require full training in specialist inspection techniques and clearly there is a limit to the number of persons that can be effectively trained and supervised at any one time. The Health and Safety Executive aims to recruit new staff at the fastest rate possible within these constraints. The recruitment targets are ambitious, and with a view to achieving them a review of grading has already been completed. A review of pay based on the grading review will soon report to the Health and Safety Executive.

Secondly, a revised code of practice on standby vessels was published jointly by the Health and Safety Executive and the Department of Transport last July. It incorporates improvements in the design and provision of equipment on these vessels as recommended by Lord Cullen.

Thirdly, many of the 106 recommendations require action from the offshore industry itself—for example, the preparation of an evacuation, escape and rescue analysis for each installation. The Health and Safety Executive is in regular contact with the industry to monitor progress and to ensure that these analyses will be completed without delay.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Bill says:

> "Clause 1 extends the general purposes . . . of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 . . . to cover the safety, health and welfare of persons on offshore installations".

Will the Secretary of State confirm that that includes divers and diving operations, as well as the crews of standby vessels?

Mr. Howard: My understanding is that both the categories identified by the hon. Gentleman are included in the provisions of clause 1.

It is neither desirable nor practicable to use the Bill to implement all the remaining recommendations of Lord Cullen, who himself made it clear that many of his recommendations should be introduced by regulations rather than primary legislation. Additionally, the recommendations for reform of existing offshore legislation require full study and wide consultation and Parliament has placed the general responsibility for developing reforms of health and safety law with the Health and Safety Commission. So, for example, new provisions on fire and explosion protection and evacuation, escape and rescue offshore will be made by regulations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act as Lord Cullen intended.

Many of Lord Cullen's other recommendations do not require any form of legislation. I have already referred to the standby vessel code; other new initiatives taken forward since publication of the Cullen report include the issue by the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association of revised guidance on offshore emergency training, and the publication of guidance on work permit systems by the oil industry advisory committee of the Health and Safety Commission.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Can I take the Secretary of State back to the staffing of the new offshore inspectorate under the HSE? He will remember that the Select Committee on Energy looked at this matter last year and advised that secondment from oil companies should be only a temporary solution because of the possible conflicts of interest, and that there should be an extensive training programme to train potential recruits with wide offshore experience to widen the pool of people available to become inspectors. In their reply, the Government were brief, but said that they were sympathetic to a new training scheme. Has anything been done since the Secretary of State's reply to the Committee?

Mr. Howard: My understanding is that that training programme is in hand and it is fully recognised that there is a need to train people who will be in place as soon as possible to discharge these onerous responsibilities.

In other cases, more information is needed before we can decide how best to implement Lord Cullen's recommendations. He recognised that further research work was necessary, for example, to determine how best to minimise the pipeline connections to platforms.

Lord Cullen also endorsed the commitment given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy in September 1989 to review the Offshore Installations (Safety Representatives and Safety Committees) Regulations 1989. This review is under way. The Health and Safety Commission considers that the review should be informed by an in-depth factual study of the practical working of the regulations. The HSE has now appointed an independent research organisation, Aberdeen university's offshore study group, to carry out this study. Work will start shortly and the study is expected to last nine months. The HSE will then consult a wider range of interested parties before making recommendations to the commission.

Lord Cullen also recommended that the Offshore Installations (Safety Representatives and Safety Committees) Regulations 1989 should be modified so that training of safety representatives should be determined and paid for by the operator. I have already mentioned that a review of the regulations is under way. As soon as the review is complete, the Government will implement this recommendation together with any other necessary changes. In the meantime, the issue is not being allowed to stagnate. I welcome the joint initiative by the main industry associations in issuing a charter of health and safety rights. This makes it clear that, among other matters, safety representatives must have industry-approved training, and paid time off for training.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Perhaps the Secretary of State will tell me that I am wrong or that I am being unduly harsh, but discussions have been going round and round, as it were, ever since the Burgoyne report. Why has the procedure taken so long? Am I missing something or am I asking a reasonable question?

Mr. Howard: That is a reasonable question to ask and there is a simple answer. The answer is that since we have had Lord Cullen's report everything has been done and is being done to implement the recommendations as soon as practicable. The discussions and the review to which I have referred are focused on the most effective way of implementing the recommendations set out in the report. Lord Cullen recognised that it would take a considerable time before these matters were put in place. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that responsibility for taking forward the recommendations is rightly in the hands of the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive. The hon. Gentleman will be fully aware of the tripartite composition of the commission.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the Secretary of State explain why proper legislative protection against victimisation is almost the only recommendation of Lord Cullen that the Government have still not implemented?

Mr. Howard: As it happens, I am just about to deal with victimisation. The hon. Gentleman will see that his question is answered.

As the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) has said, another of Lord Cullen's recommendations was that safety representatives should be protected against victimisation. In order to fulfil this recommendation, the Government intend to amend employment protection legislation to ensure that representatives who have been dismissed or otherwise victimised because of their safety role can gain redress through an industrial tribunal. But such legislation falls outside the scope of the Bill, which deals with safety matters rather than employment issues. We shall take the matter forward as soon as a suitable legislative vehicle becomes available.

Victimisation of workers who raise safety concerns is completely unacceptable. It undermines the objective of increased safety awareness. Where there is clear evidence of intimidation, the HSE will investigate it because it could indicate weaknesses in the safety management system. The name and address of an offshore inspector is displayed on every offshore installation and if workers contact the HSE anonymity is guaranteed if requested. If health and safety standards are being threatened, the HSE would take the necessary enforcement action where there is sufficient evidence of intimidation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I think that there will be a general welcome from hon. Members on both sides of the House for my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement that there will be further legislation to cover employment matters. Will the information that is made available about health and safety and the inspector be made available also on onshore, non-oil areas of employment? To take up his remarks about operators being required to finance the training of safety representatives, do the Government intend to continue their funding of the trade union movement so that trade unions can undertake some of the training themselves and give support to the non-oil related representatives at the workplace as well?

Mr. Howard: On my hon. Friend's first point, I have recently received a request from the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress for the Government to continue their grant towards its training activities. I am considering that request and I shall make my response known in due course. On his second point, I am not entirely convinced that it is necessary to have the same information available at all onshore facilities, but I shall consider the matter.

Mr. Salmond: The Secretary of State says, as he has before, that the victimisation investigated and established is unacceptable to the Government. He said that there would be an amendment to employment legislation to allow the matter to go to industrial tribunals. What penalties would be available against either the operators or the oil companies that were found guilty of victimisation of workers, whether or not they were safety representatives? If the Government find victimisation so

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unacceptable, what penalties will be available under the changes that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is proposing?

Mr. Howard: If, for example, a worker were dismissed because he had made a complaint to the HSE, he could bring proceedings for unfair dismissal on the basis of constructive dismissal. He could obtain considerable compensation from an industrial tribunal.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Secretary of State accept that, in a sense, legislation to deal with that issue is at least as urgent as the need for the Bill? He will be aware of the case of Mr. Colin Jewell, which has been well publicised. He took his complaint about safety faults to the HSE. It was investigated and upheld, but he is now unable to find employment in the North sea. He has no compensation and no security. Because of that, many people are not prepared to make complaints about safety problems and safety design faults, even though they see them every day.

Mr. Howard: I agree that it is important that Lord Cullen's recommendation is put into effect as soon as possible—and it will be as soon as a suitable legislative vehicle is available. The Bill does not provide that vehicle. We shall ensure that the law is changed to provide the protection to which hon. Members have referred, as soon as it is possible to do so.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I apologise for interrupting the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Will he confirm that there are no procedural reasons why the issue of victimisation should not be included in the Bill? If someone is being victimised, and he is a safety representative, surely it is as important for safety reasons as for employment reasons to ensure that the matter is covered in the Bill.

Mr. Howard: The safety aspects have been considered and, as I have said, they are covered by the extent to which anonymous complaints can be made to the HSE. Therefore, the direct safety aspects are covered already. We have been advised that the matter is outside the scope of the Bill. The hon. Gentleman will readily appreciate that a Bill that covers employment issues would be subject to amendment on a whole range of issues. That could delay the passage of the Bill, to which we attach considerable importance. I must make it clear that we intend to legislate to cover Lord Cullen's victimisation recommendation as soon as it is possible to do so.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's reply simply does not wash. He knows that both the long title and the short title of the Bill are entirely in the Government's hands and that there is no statutory reason why the Bill should not cover victimisation. I accept his point that if employment provisions were attached to the Bill that could widen its scope, but he knows that the Bill has the good will of the House and that we would not want to delay it. It was irresponsible of him to suggest that the Opposition would create procedural difficulties to delay the Bill; it was wrong to give that impression. With the agreement of the Opposition, the issue of victimisation could be dealt with here and now.

Mr. Howard: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman fully understood the point that I was making. I certainly was not making any accusations about the Opposition's attitude. Employment issues arouse concern in all parts of the House, and many individual right hon. and hon. Members—regardless of the attitude taken by members of the Opposition Front Bench—might want to use employment legislation as a vehicle for changing employment law in one of a number of respects. That is clearly a possibility, in respect of which it would not be possible for members of the Opposition Front Bench to give any assurance, and it could lead to delay. We want the legislation to be on the statute book as soon as possible —and we do not want to risk delay on that account.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I ask my right hon. and learned Friend, who makes a fair point, to consider that when the employment legislation comes forward it should be made retrospective to this month. We would hate any suggestion of people in the offshore industry, or in any other, being inhibited in speaking plainly on safety matters. I will not ask my right hon. and learned Friend for an instant response, but I ask the Government to consider that aspect.

Also, the legislation that would be required under an ordinary employment Bill could be relatively simple. It might be possible for a Back Bencher in any part of the House to present a Bill which, if it raised no objection and was simple, could go through the House and another place without difficulty. I do not expect my right hon. and learned Friend to answer immediately, but perhaps he will consider those suggestions and answer at the end of the debate, or in a day or two.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend was kind enough not to ask for an immediate response to his points. He sought an assurance about the retrospective effect of any such legislation. I cannot hold out any great hope of any breach in any constitutional principle and precedent to that extent. I repeat my earlier point: the safety aspects are currently covered by the arrangements for anonymous complaints to be made.

My hon. Friend suggested also that it might be possible for a Back Bencher to bring forward appropriate legislation. As I understand it, it is the intention of a Back-Bench member of another place to introduce legislation that purports to cover the point. It would not do so satisfactorily, and it is technically defective. However, I am prepared to listen to the debate in another place in relation to that legislation, and to take into account the points made this afternoon, before determining the Government's final attitude to the Bill that is to be brought forward in another place.

Mr. Dalyell: Perhaps I may disabuse the Secretary of State on the question of anonymous complaints. A number of right hon. and hon. Members represent consitutents who work in the North sea, and know very well the reality of anonymous complaints. If one rings the HSE, one is asked, "Where, when, and who?" If one cannot answer, one is bombed out and is told that as there is no proof, the complaint cannot be backed up. On one occasion, I revealed, with the consent of the person involved, the full nature of the complaint. The next time round, such an individual has it taken out on him. Life is pretty rough. The Secretary of State talks about anonymous complaints being a kind of safety valve, but that is not how it works in the North sea.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman does not give full credit to the Health and Safety Executive and its ability to investigate. If a health and safety risk, a breach of regulations or some other undesirable practice is drawn to the executive's attention, it has widespread powers to investigate, and it does so. I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not wish to give the impression that it is pointless for complaints to be drawn to the attention of the Health and Safety Executive, as I believe that that would be very damaging to the cause of safety. It is not pointless, and I want to encourage the making of complaints to the HSE, so that they can be investigated properly.

As I have said, we shall take into account everything that has been said this afternoon, and also what is said in another place, before finally determining our attitude to the legislation that is being presented in another place.

Mr. Blair: If we tabled an amendment in Committee to deal with the victimisation point, and if that amendment was in order, would the Secretary of State at least undertake to accept it?

Mr. Howard: If that is possible—which I doubt—we shall of course give it careful consideration. The hon. Gentleman may conclude, however, that the legislation being presented in another place is a more promising vehicle, although I do not think that it is very satisfactory in its present state.

Let me make a further point about victimisation. If a safety representative has been victimised to the point of being unable to carry out his functions, the installation operator and owner are in breach of the Offshore Installations (Safety Representatives and Safety Committees) Regulations 1989 as things stand, and enforcement action can be taken on that basis.

Other recommendations involving work force involvement in safety are aimed principally at the industry: they refer to the involvement of the whole work force, the role of first-line supervisors and line management. These matters are an essential part of an effective safety management system, recommended by Lord Cullen as one of the key features of the safety case. These recommendations will be implemented by the forthcoming safety case regulations and accompanying guidance. I shall outline the purpose of the safety case in a moment; the Health and Safety Commission is making this its first priority.

The task before us is extensive. Lord Cullen himself said recently that

> "nobody could underestimate the magnitude of the task which faces the Health and Safety Executive".

Much, therefore, remains to be done, in particular to improve and reform the existing health and safety legislation which applies to offshore installations.

Lord Cullen saw two main elements. First, regulations should be made to require the operator of every offshore installation, fixed or mobile, to submit a "safety case" for acceptance by the Health and Safety Executive. I repeat that that is taking top priority. The commission plans to issue a consultative document, with draft regulations and guidance, on 24 February. The new regulations would be implemented progressively for new and existing installations, starting in 1993.

The second main element recommended by Lord Cullen was that existing offshore health and safety legislation should be progressively replaced by new regulations. Those new regulations should set operators objectives to be achieved, rather than prescribing detailed measures to be taken. Lord Cullen called them "goal-setting" regulations. They will underpin the new safety case regime by defining the necessary standards to apply to every installation.

The purpose of the Bill is to pave the way for the second of those main legislative tasks—the reform of existing offshore health and safety legislation. In doing so, it implements recommendation 18 of Lord Cullen's report, and enables new regulations to be developed by the Health and Safety Commission to implement many other recommendations. The Bill is an essential step towards constructing the new goal-setting regulatory regime. It will not of itself alter the existing regime; it deals with the technical legal changes that are necessary to allow the development of the goal-setting regime to take place. It is an important first stage in the process.

Let me now briefly outline the main provisions of the Bill. The primary objective of clause 1 is to make existing offshore safety legislation into what the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 refers to as "existing statutory provisions". That will allow the existing offshore safety legislation to be replaced progressively by new regulations made under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act.

Clause 2 extends the "general purposes" of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act to cover the safety of onshore pipelines and the prevention of damage to such pipelines; and the protection of the public from the dangers of the transmission and use of gas.

Clause 3 contains a number of provisions consequential on clauses 1 and 2. The principal change removes any requirement for the Secretary of State for Energy to consider safety when exercising his licensing functions. This is to effect the "clean break" between the Secretary of State for Energy's petroleum exploration and development licensing regime and health and safety, as recommended by Lord Cullen. But clause 7(3) provides for revocation to come into force only by my order. I can give the House an assurance that that will not be done until the safety case regulations are in place, considerably strengthening the safety regime.

The Government have also taken the opportunity presented by the Bill to introduce measures relating to penalties for health and safety offences, security and application of the Bill's provisions to Northern Ireland.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way on clause 4?

Mr. Howard: I am just coming to clause 4, if the hon. Gentleman will contain himself.

I know that many right hon. and hon. Members are particularly interested in clause 4, which deals with penalties for certain health and safety offences, whether on or offshore. Prosecution is, of course, only one of the enforcement tools available to inspectors. But prosecutions have an important part to play and the Government continue to be committed to good health and safety standards, supported by significant penalties for those who fail to meet those standards. The main provisions in the clause will raise the maximum penalties in two categories.

The first category of offences is under sections 2 to 6 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, for which the

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maximum fine that a magistrates court may impose will be increased from £2,000 to £20,000. The maximum penalty for these offences in a Crown court of an unlimited fine will remain unaffected. Offences under these sections are likely to be more serious than other offences, and therefore more deserving of a higher penalty, because cases are brought under them when there is a general failure to manage health and safety adequately.

The second category of offences is failure to comply with an improvement or prohibition notice, or to comply with a court remedy order made under section 42 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act. For these offences, the penalties on conviction will be increased in a magistrates court from the current maximum of £2,000 to a maximum fine of £20,000, or six months imprisonment, or both. On conviction in a Crown court, these offences will carry a maximum penalty of an unlimited fine or two years imprisonment, or both. These offences are especially serious because they show at best culpable neglect and at worst deliberate flouting of a duty under law by the employers, despite specific issues having been brought to their attention by an inspector. Of course, the increased maximum penalties will also apply to cases taken in sheriff courts in Scotland. I suspect that that may be the point that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) wishes to raise.

Dr. Godman: Will the Secretary of State confirm that under this clause proceedings can be instituted in sheriff courts in Scotland and, perhaps, in the High Court? With regard to the Piper Alpha tragedy, many of us firmly believe that the directors of Occidental should have been brought to the High Court in Edinburgh to face a charge of culpable homicide. That was not possible, because there is no vicarious responsibility in cases of this kind. The Secretary of State mentioned Crown courts in England and sheriff courts in Scotland, but what of the High Court in Scotland?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is raising a slightly different point when he introduces the issue of vicarious liability. I shall have to check the precise jurisdiction of the High Court in Scotland on these matters, but in England proceedings can be brought in both magistrates courts and Crown courts, depending upon the seriousness of the offence.

Mr. Dalyell: It would be unreasonable to expect the Secretary of State to make pronouncements on Scots law, but it would be useful if there were to be a statement from the Crown Office on its attitude to these matters. They are not hypothetical but very real and very important matters.

Mr. Howard: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland—my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)—who is on the Front Bench at the moment, will have heard the hon. Gentleman's question and will no doubt take it into consideration.

Every accident is a tragedy not just for the person injured but for family, friends and colleagues. Accident prevention must be the first priority for employers, workers and the regulatory bodies. These new penalties are a signal to those with health and safety duties that the Government are determined that those duties should be taken seriously.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that responsibility both for the safety case and for the safety of workers and sub-contractors' employees will always remain with the employer and the operator and that in no sense will the health and safety inspectorate take responsibility?

Mr. Howard: Not only does safety remain the responsibility of the operator, but the purpose of the legislation is to reinforce that responsibility and to increase the penalties for failure to discharge it.

Clause 5 deals with security of oil and gas installations. Similar statutory provision already exists for the telecommunications, electricity and water industries. The clause is closely modelled on those provisions, which have proved satisfactory to date.

The purpose of the clause is to empower the Secretary of State—in this case my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary—to issue directions to operators of an offshore installation, onshore terminal or oil refinery to maintain their security. Before issuing any such directions, the Home Secretary would be required to consult the operator concerned and the Health and Safety Executive.

Clause 6 deals with the parliamentary mechanism for extending the provisions of the Bill to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has a separate system of health and safety law, and it is therefore appropriate for the Bill's provisions to be applied to Northern Ireland as necessary by a separate Order in Council. Clause 6 provides for the use of the negative resolution procedure, enabling this to be done with the minimum possible delay soon after the Great Britain legislation becomes effective.

Clause 7 deals principally with the short title of the Bill and the necessary repeals. For the most part, the Bill will come into effect on Royal Assent. The exceptions are those parts dealing with the model clauses—to which I have already referred—and those parts dealing with gas safety. Clause 7 also limits the application of the Bill to Great Britain.

I hope that I have left the House in no doubt that the Government intend to fulfil their commitment to implement all of Lord Cullen's recommendations. The Bill and the Health and Safety Commission's forthcoming consultative document on the safety case regulations are evidence of our concern and intention to implement as fast as we possibly can. Where specific proposals are not being implemented at once it is for good and valid reasons. Our priority is to set in hand, as soon as possible, the major safety improvements recommended by Lord Cullen, and that is what we are doing.

The Bill is an important part of the implementation of the recommendations of the Cullen report on the Piper Alpha disaster, providing for the highest standards of offshore safety for those who work in our vital oil, gas and related industries. It is an essential underpinning of the offshore safety regime, outlined and recommended by Lord Cullen, and depending on the integrity, commitment and excellence of our Health and Safety Commission and Health and Safety Executive. I recommend the Bill to the House.

4.42 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): This is an important Bill, and at the outset I wish to pay tribute to my hon. Friends, both Front-Bench and Back-Bench Members, who have done so much to campaign on the issues relative to it. Their work has been of invaluable assistance throughout.

On 6 July 1988, on the Piper Alpha platform, there occurred the worst disaster in the history of offshore oil production. Of the 226 men working on the platform, 165 died. A further two—members of the crew of the Sandhaven fast-rescue craft—were killed in a brave attempt to rescue survivors. Following the obvious and natural public outcry over the disaster, an inquiry was established. Chaired by Lord Cullen, it lasted more than a year. Lord Cullen's report has rightly been the object of very wide praise, and in this regard I entirely concur with the remarks made by the Secretary of State. Lord Cullen made 106 recommendations about improvement of the offshore oil safety regime for the North sea. This Bill represents one part of the implementation of the Cullen recommendations. Although there are reservations, and in one case an important addition that we would canvass, we support the Bill in general, of course, and want to see it introduced quickly.

North sea oil is, and has been, of fundamental significance to the United Kingdom economy. It generates wealth to the Exchequer, profit to the oil companies, and employment for many thousands of people. However, it must be said that oil production is a frontier industry. Its employees work in extreme conditions, often in circumstances of great danger, and in a market that is both volatile and highly competitive. There must be no possibility at any time of profit being put before the welfare of those in the industry who create the profit. Those brave men and women who work offshore are entitled to the highest possible standards of safety and to the full guarantee of the state that it will police those standards, enforce them rigorously and prosecute any who break them.

The Piper Alpha disaster revealed failures in the formulation and application of those standards at almost every level—failures in the safety systems, in the personnel implementing them, and in Government supervision of them. The Cullen report pointed out those failures, and its recommendations were designed to deal with them. The central point that we would make, however, is that it is not merely in the form of legislation or in the writing of the rules that safety will be secured. The form must be accompanied by the content, and the writing by insistence on implementation down the line on the offshore platforms, where it really matters.

I recall very clearly becoming the shadow Secretary of State for Energy shortly after the Piper Alpha disaster. Obviously, the matter was very much in the minds of all those working in the industry. It became clear to me, first, that, certainly at a senior executive level, a severe shock had been suffered throughout the industry as a result of Piper Alpha. There was total commitment, on paper at any rate, to a review of safety procedures. But, equally—and this is the point—the men working on the platforms were often faced with down-the-line management which was under enormous pressure and which the men said was willing to take liberties with the rules. I think that I am right in saying that about two thirds of those working on the Piper Alpha platform were contractors not directly in the employment of the companies themselves.

We can have the very best onshore safety procedures in the world, but they are useless unless they are followed by managers offshore, down the line. It should be said that there is still considerable concern among the men about whether the theoretical commitment of senior management to offshore safety is shared by all those who have the practical job of implementing it and extracting the oil.

A claim made repeatedly throughout the Cullen inquiry, by trade unions and others representing the men, was that there was widespread intimidation of employees with respect to safety matters. In particular, it was claimed that those raising safety issues could in certain instances be regarded as troublemakers, and the letters "NRB"—not required back—could be entered on their employment card. It is said that those subject to NRB were, and are, effectively black-listed in respect of employment. It is in the nature of those claims that they are difficult to prove, but it is clear that they exist and are genuinely believed by many working in the industry, and often by those representing the workers.

Such feelings were bound to be especially acute when, in many cases, the men were denied the full involvement of their trade unions at the workplace even though they believed that such involvement was an essential part of the guarantee of good safety standards. I simply say to the Secretary of State that these pressures still exist. Indeed, they may well intensify, as, I understand, a feature of the most recent oil exploration and production is that, although the amount extracted will be greater, and although the production period will be longer than was originally thought, the new developments tend to be on smaller fields. Therefore, the costs of extraction are greater, and pressure on profit and cost is more intense. That is why we must examine all related issues raised with a determined scepticism to ensure that the fine promises made are delivered in the necessary way.

The accident on Piper Alpha occurred at about 10 pm on 6 July when there was an explosion in the C module caused by the ignition of a low-level cloud of condensate that had leaked from the condensate injection pump. One pump had tripped and another pump, A pump, was started up. Unknown to the operators, the pump had been shut down for maintenance and its pressure safety valve was off. Instead, at the site of that valve was a blind flange assembly, which should have been leak tight. However, it was not, so the condensate escaped. The operators should have known of the unsuitability of the pump through the permit-to-work system by which essential work is regulated through permits. In this instance, the permit to work had been suspended as the maintenance work was incomplete, but it appears that that fact was not properly communicated to the operators.

The condensate that leaked ignited and the explosion in C module led to a fire in B module about 20 minutes later —at about 10.20 pm there was a second explosion. As the Cullen report found, there was no systematic attempt to evacuate accommodation. Survivors essentially made their own escape; there were problems with standby vessels, and training for evacuation and fire fighting. It would not be putting it too strongly to say that those who survived did so mainly through luck and their own devices.

There were failures within the safety system, and of procedures for dealing with the consequences of a disaster

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once it had occurred. Responsibility for policing the offshore safety regimes of the oil companies on the platforms lay mainly with the Department of Energy, although other organisations did have some locus in relation to different safety aspects.

In his report, Lord Cullen dealt with the record of the Department of Energy in relation to inspections on Piper Alpha by saying that the findings of inspections done in the year preceding the disaster as a result of an earlier incident.

> "were in striking contrast to what was revealed in evidence at the Inquiry. Even after making allowance for the fact that the inspections were based on sampling it was clear to me that they were superficial to the point of being of little use as a test of safety on the platform. They did not reveal a number of clear cut and readily ascertainable deficiencies. While the effectiveness of inspections has been affected by persistent under-manning and inadequate guidance, the evidence led me to question, in a fundamental sense, whether the type of inspection practised by the Department of Energy could be an effective means of assessing or monitoring the management of safety by operators."

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): My hon. Friend may not be aware that, prior to the Piper Alpha disaster, divers' associations, in evidence to the Select Commmittee on Energy, expressed concern that the programme of inspection and maintenance was influenced by the price of oil. If the price dropped, inspections were shoved back towards the five-year period and did not take place annually as they should have done. Will the Minister say whether that practice still exists?

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend raises an important point. There is anxiety throughout the industry that, in a volatile market where profits fluctuate tremendously with the price of oil, there is always a danger that corners are cut. I mention to the Secretary of State, although I do not expect an immediate response, that there has been concern among deep sea divers about the effect of European safety regulations on the operations of deep sea divers. Perhaps if I or one of my hon. Friends writes to him he will investigate the matter.

There can hardly have been a more comprehensive criticism of each stage of the procedures affecting safety than that made by Lord Cullen. His recommendations bear out the severity of the criticism and cover every part of the operations. Although this is something of an oversimplification, there are effectively two parts to Lord Cullen's recommendations: first, the transfer of regulatory powers from the Department of Energy and other organisations to the Health and Safety Executive, and the full application of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to offshore work; secondly, the development of a new regime of offshore safety, through the formulation of safety cases prepared by platform operators in respect of each installation, to be certified by the Health and Safety Executive, which will cover all aspects of offshore safety.

Trade unions, many of my hon. Friends and other interested parties have long campaigned for the Health and Safety Executive to undertake responsibility for offshore safety and the regulations previously in the hands of the Department of Engery. The Burgoyne committee produced a minority report more than a decade ago, under the lead of two trade union representatives, Mr. Lyons and Mr. Miller. It specifically called for such a transfer to be made. Clause 1 of the Bill is designed to achieve that aim which we clearly welcome. The Bill should enable a much clearer chain of command and implement the idea of one agency to cover all aspects of safety.

The Health and Safety Executive will bring forward regulations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act. Safety will be central to those regulations, which will deal both with the design of the operation and its safety procedures, including the permit-to-work system and temporary safe refuge.

Mr. Dalyell: I am not a great one for saying, "I told you so" but, following discussions with Mr. Miller, I had an Adjournment debate on the precise subject of the minority report. I urged the Government of the day to do exactly as he wished. Had that been done, the story might have been a little less tragic.

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point in respect of the transfer of the safety regulations to the Health and Safety Executive. The position was always strange and unsatisfactory, first, because the Department of Energy was close to the producer interest and, secondly, a plethora of organisations, not just the Department of Energy, dealt with safety aspects. It was unsatisfactory that more than one agency should handle safety matters.

The safety cases are due to be updated every three to five years. In addition, new regulations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act cover construction, fire fighting and standby vessels—all aspects in which key problems were identified. Another secton of the safety case will involve training for emergencies—an important deficiency recognised by Lord Cullen.

There is one conceptual difference between the Cullen recommendations and the usual method of procedure: the notion of the regulations being not prescriptive, but goal-setting, so that their flexibility allows them to deal with varying circumstances. Judgments will be made as to the practical effect of each safety case in turn rather than an attempt being made to legislate for every last detail.

That process may be sensible, but it will surely have the consequence of contralising the inspection and enforcement procedures of the regulatory organisation. It is a judgmental system and it will require the most careful investigation before a judgment is made. That, in turn, puts pressure on the staff and financing of the Health and Safety Executive.

We have been told that, by 1994-95, the section of the Health and Safety Executive that deals with offshore safety will have a budget of about £35 million and staff of more than 400. I trust that those additional staff and resources will not be taken from anywhere else in the Health and Safety Executive. The programme should be carried through as quickly as possible. By 1994-95 it will be six years or more since the Piper Alpha disaster. I appreciate that there have been staff recruitment problems, but the additional staff should be in place as soon as possible. If the process is to involve goal-setting regulations, rather than prescriptive procedures, it is vital that there are the necessary staff and resources to implement the proposal properly.

There are two substantial points about the detail of the Bill. Clause 5 will permit the Secretary of State to give directions to preserve the security of any installation. He is then obliged to lay before Parliament a copy of the direction "unless he is of the opinion that disclosure of the direction is against the interests of national security or the commercial interests of any person."

The Secretary of State knows that concern has been expressed in the other place about a possible conflict between the issue of safety, the security of the installation and the direction that might be given under clause 5. That makes scrutiny of any direction all the more important. To protect it for national security is one thing, but to protect it for commercial interests is another. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point.

The second fundamental point became the subject of exchanges during the speech by the Secretary of State. Unless there is action, we must register strong disagreement with the Government's course. Recommendation No. 30, one of Lord Cullen's crucial recommendations, was that safety representatives should be protected against victimisation by a provision similar to section 58 of the Employment Protection Act 1978. It is important to understand that section 58 protects employees against dismissal for trade union activities. Most importantly, it also provides that the two-year qualifying period to claim unfair dismissal does not apply in the circumstances of dismissal for trade union activities. The protection is immediate and the penalties are far larger than those for ordinary cases of unfair dismissal.

Lord Cullen believed that immediate protection should apply in respect of complaints about safety as it applies in respect of dismissal for trade union activities. That is vital because if a safety representative can be dismissed or disciplined because of complaints about safety, a major part of the safety regime is subject to collapse. Recommendation No. 30 is missing from the Bill.

We have heard the explanation from the Secretary of State today. If there is truly a procedural bar, we should investigate it carefully because I cannot believe that it is beyond our wit to frame an acceptable amendment which would implement recommendation No. 30. We will do our best to frame such an amendment.

The more substantive point made by the Secretary of State is that victimisation is an employment issue rather than a safety issue. In our view, it is plainly a health and safety matter if someone is victimised as a result of complaining about health and safety matters. It is an employment matter, but it is also a matter that has a direct bearing on the efficacy of the safety regime. If people can be disciplined in such a way, clearly there is something deeply wrong with the safety regime that is being implemented by the company. The Secretary of State has not given an acceptable reason for not legislating.

Dr. Godman: The fears of offshore workers are widespread. At my most recent surgery, a constituent came to see me with a specific concern and complaint about standby vessels and the unsuitability of some of them. He implored me to give no suggestion of his identity and he said that even referring to a "constituent" might place his job in some jeopardy. Those decent, honourable and fine men are very frightened of the wrath of their employers if they bring complaints to light, even to Members of Parliament in their surgeries.

Mr. Blair: The House will have heard my hon. Friend's point. Hon. Members who have constituents who work offshore are familiar with such cases. It is deeply worrying that such practices continue. My hon. Friend underlines the point that I have sought to make, which is that, however many regulations one has, if there is not proper protection for people making complaints, it becomes difficult for the regulations to be implemented. It is a matter of deep concern.

I met some people in Newcastle a short time ago who work offshore. They had no axe to grind, but they believed that they had been subject to blacklisting by companies as a result of trade union activities or for raising matters in relation to safety. It is in the nature of things that such claims are difficult to prove. However, the clamour and the degree of complaint are such that we should be unwise to treat the matter other than seriously.

The absence of a clause embodying recommendation No. 30 is a considerable worry. North sea oil contracts are often short-term contracts, so it is especially important that such a clause is included. Procedural matters may be involved, but I believe that the clause should be added because its absence will have an effect both on the estimation of the Government's sincerity in introducing the Bill and on the efficacy of the regime as a whole.

No prosecution has resulted from the Piper Alpha disaster, and it would not be right to complete a Second Reading debate without raising that point. I am advised that a prosecution could have been brought either under the specific regulations dealing with offshore matters or under the general provisions of the health and safety legislation relating to safe places of work and to safe systems of work. The case was fairly clear. On the basis of the Cullen report, the permit-to-work system was subject to repeated failures, the fire water system was flawed in spite of an audit recommendation before the disaster that it should be changed, and the training for emergencies was deficient. In general, Lord Cullen found that the Occidental management

"adopted a superficial attitude to the assessment of the risk of major hazard."

In those circumstances, it is scarcely believable that no prima facie case could be found against the company or against anyone connected with it in relation to the disaster. I ask the Minister to deal with the point about the absence of prosecutions when he winds up the debate.

We seek answers on the staffing and resources of the Health and Safety Executive, the impact of clause 5 on the safety regime, the absence of the Cullen report's recommendation No. 30 and the failure to prosecute. Those matters do not vitiate our support for the Bill, but they are serious and they require answers. Those points bring us back to the recurring theme of all debates since the Piper Alpha disaster. The Piper Alpha disaster arose out of massive deficiencies of safety management, supervision and regulation. On the face of it, the Government are committed to remedying those deficiencies in accordance with the Cullen report. However, among many who work in the industry, whatever the Government's acceptance in theory of the need for radical change, there remains doubt about the practical implementation of that radical change.

It would be wrong not to welcome the Bill, but it would equally be wrong not to signal eternal vigilance on our part until every last recommendation of the Cullen inquiry is implemented and acted on so that the 30,000 people or more who even now work offshore to produce the nation's oil do so in conditions of safety. They deserve no less.

5.8 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I welcome the Government's commitment to offshore safety not only on my own account, but on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd) who, because of his ministerial responsibility, cannot speak on the matter although he has it very much at heart.

I was glad that the Government immediately accepted the 106 recommendations of the Cullen report. It always seemed to me a rum do that safety was not in the hands of the Health and Safety Executive and I am glad that one of the first things that the Government did in April 1991 was to take administrative steps to remedy the situation. I am glad that the Bill, which will transfer statutory responsibility, is before the House.

I am glad that the penalties are to be so substantially increased and that they are to include a hefty slice of imprisonment. People working in an industry as wealthy as the oil industry might turn up their noses at a fine, or brush it off light-heartedly. They will not brush off a term of imprisonment of six months, still less of two years. As the Minister said, those who are culpably negligent, despite the instructions of the inspectors, deserve the maximum sentence of two years.

I would not do the job that these men do for all the tea in China. They are quite exceptionally brave, not just on the rigs but in travelling to and from them. It must be a nightmare for them and it must be at the back of their families' minds. I hope that the helicopters by which they are transported will be examined most carefully.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Lady has made a good point about the penalties for the breach of health and safety regulations. What penalties would she think it appropriate to apply to a company found to have discriminated against an employee because he has raised a safety concern?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I should have thought that that was a matter to be dealt with in the Bill that will probably come before this House, which is currently before their Lordships. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said, that Bill may be amended to cover such matters. I should have thought that there should be a substantial fine, but that will be for the other place to decide and for us to consider when the Bill comes before us.

One matter that has been raised with me repeatedly —although I do not have as many constituents engaged in offshore activity as some hon. Members—is the ease with which work permits could be obtained, to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred in his opening remarks. It seemed to me that one could more or less get one in the pub, in exchange for a packet of fags, and I wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend's predecessor on the matter.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Perhaps the hon. Lady is referring not to permits to work—issued under a regime operated on the platforms themselves—but to the necessary safety certificates required before people can work offshore.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman is much better informed about these things than I am. He is exactly right that that was the point that I raised with the previous Secretary of State. It is extremely important.

Like the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), I agree with the Minister that it is a good idea to set operators objectives to be achieved but not to set out exactly how that should be done. Offshore installations vary widely in their conditions, and an inflexible regime would not be as effective as the one proposed in the Bill, which is flexible but none the less strict.

I hope that the Bill will bring to a group of extremely brave men and women safety and the peace of mind that must have been blown away by the horrible Piper Alpha incident and others, and I wish the Bill godspeed.

5.13 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): All hon. Members realise that the Bill has arisen out of the worst possible North sea tragedy at Piper Alpha. The survivors and the relatives of those who died live and relive that horrendous event and cannot erase the trauma from their minds. Nor should we seek to do so. We have an awesome and enormous responsibility to ensure that every effort is made to avoid the peril of such an incident ever being repeated.

The offshore industry is probably unique, both in the hostile environment in which it operates and in its employment practices. The seventh report of the Select Committee on Energy in 1990-91 points out that at that time the offshore work force in the United Kingdom sector was more than 36,000. Of those, only 25 per cent. were oil company employees. The Select Committee drew attention to the fact that half the offshore installations registered in the United Kingdom are owned and operated by contractors. Some 50 to 90 per cent. of the work force on those platforms is made up of contractors, some of them working under very short-term contracts—for a few days or a few weeks—and some under long-term contracts.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from that experience. There are pluses and minuses in the way in which the offshore industry operates. There is a floating population of people who move from platform to platform and take their experience with them. It can be argued that that is a benefit and is good for the safety regime because people pick up experience as they move. On the other hand, one of the problems is that many of the individual oil companies have developed their own safety systems, and confusion sometimes arises as between one practice and the other. We certainly need some uniform guidelines in the industry.

The United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association has helped with guidelines on training and so on and on the permit-to-work system. Work has also been done to try to achieve greater uniformity between operators on emergency warnings and such matters, and that can certainly bring a net safety benefit.

There is widespread concern, however, about the squeeze on tender prices. Since the drop in oil prices in 1986, contractors have found that their competitive bids have been under intense pressure, and the work force has been the first to suffer. Its remuneration has been squeezed, in real terms, to the levels that it reached during the peak offshore construction periods of the 1970s. Conditions are actually worse than they were then. With contractors having their margins squeezed, everything has had to be pared and corners have had to be cut. There is real and widespread concern that the margins are so small that safety will suffer.

It has also been pointed out that one of the problems arising from the shortage of the margin in tendering is that good-quality standby vessels are lying idle while inferior vessels are still in use. In some cases, licences have been withdrawn, and that is good. But the standby vessel system is still not as it should be.

It is indicative of the way in which these things operate —although to a certain extent this is a peripheral point —that many offshore vessels are built abroad. I asked a prominent Aberdeen trawler owner who is now in standby vessels—to spare his blushes, I shall not mention his name —"Why not build new vessels, and build them in Britain?" His answer was simple, blunt and straightforward: "I will build new vessels, and I will build them in Britain, if I get a good enough subsidy from the Government." If that is the attitude of those responsible for supplying standby vessels offshore, it should be deprecated.

It would be churlish not to recognise that there have been improvements in general safety offshore. Anyone who said that nothing had changed would have his credibility as a witness to argue and advocate the case for safety destroyed.

In general terms, I welcome the Bill, although I am not wholly convinced that the abandonment of detailed regulations in favour of the safety case is absolutely correct. I have my doubts and am hesitant about that. I still believe that the regulatory regime should be more strict in terms of practices. However, I accept the path down which we are to proceed. I shall do everything to ensure that the safety case works. There is no reason now or in the recent past to condemn the safety case outright. We must give it a good try and make sure that it works because so much is at stake if it does not work. I pay tribute to the industry for what it has done so far. I hope that it will consider the safety issue with continued vigour and that it will always be alert to the dangers.

One would expect unanimous enthusiastic support for the provisions in the Bill. There is certainly support, but there is a glaring anomaly and deficiency in the Bill. There is still no legal protection against unfair dismissal of safety representatives or trade unionists. That is a matter of great concern and disquiet. That lack of protection is extremely unhealthy for the safety regime. That problem could so easily be corrected and the fears dispelled if it were not for the Government's blinkered ideology. That is the only reason why they are not dealing with protection against victimisation.

As the Front-Bench spokesmen and others have said, proving victimisation is extremely difficult. We have all heard of cases in which people have been dismissed where it is almost impossible to prove with certainty that there has been victimisation. I want to summarise case S/3497/91, an industrial tribunal case which took place in Aberdeen on 28 November of last year. It was a claim for unfair dismissal by Mr. Douglas Steele against Smedvig Limited of Altens in Aberdeen.

Mr. Steele was dismissed for an alleged serious breach of safety regulations on 5 June 1991. He had been employed as a lead hand with the company since 3 May 1988. He had been working on rig 1, north-west Sutton, where it had been reported that he and another man had been seen to cross handrails separating rig 2 from the helideck on rig 1. Mr. Steele was interviewed by Mr. Richman—I hope that I have pronounced his name properly—who was the senior tool pusher on rig one.

Mr. Steele admitted that he had crossed the handrails, but said that that was a common practice and was a short cut. Mr. Richman telephoned Mr. Coyle onshore, and it was decided that Mr. Steele should be removed immediately from the platform and that his dismissal should be discussed once he was onshore. If I have read the tribunal report correctly, before he left the rig, he was given a reference from Mr. Richman which concluded by wishing Mr. Steele well in his future employment. That is a back-handed way of saying that Mr. Steele had been given the sack.

Mr. Steele was dismissed and no action was taken against the other person who had been seen with Mr. Steele crossing the handrail. In fact, as the tribunal reports, the other individual was retained by the company and subsequently promoted to fill the vacancy left by Mr. Steele's dismissal. That is very odd. The tribunal found no clear evidence that Mr. Steele or anyone else had been warned about the dangers of crossing the handrail or that crossing the handrail was an offence that could lead to instant dismissal.

At this point, I want to interject a few comments. I accept that it can be argued—and I would argue—that safety is a matter for every individual, whatever his or her particular job may be. I accept that workers should be aware that crossing a safety rail is dangerous. It is obviously there for a specific purpose. I do not dissent from the general proposition that safety is as much a matter of individual responsibility as of corporate responsibility.

However, if a dangerous practice is commonplace, that represents a serious defect in the safety procedures. The employer's immediate response should be to investigate the circumstances fully so that such a breach does not recur in future. The tribunal evidence clearly shows that the company did not follow up the matter prior to Mr. Steele's summary dismissal.

The tribunal found that the dismissal was unfair and Mr. Steele was awarded £11,925 compensation which was reduced by 25 per cent. as it was held that he had contributed to his dismissal. The company has said that there is no job available for Mr. Steele. Mr. Steele and the tribunal accepted that the downturn in offshore operations meant that he would be unable to get work elsewhere.

An industrial tribunal simply records the facts. It makes no judgment or comment on an extraordinary case. Mr. Steele was summarily dismissed for breaches of safety procedure. The other offender took over his job temporarily until the end of the trip and was then permanently promoted to the job for the next trip offshore. What possible explanation can there be for what I can only describe as that company's complete irresponsibility?

A clue to the answer to that question might be found in point D on page 2 of the tribunal report which states:

> "There was no evidence to support the suggestion in his originating application that there had been some kind of plot to get rid of the applicant and equally there was nothing to show that his election as a safety representative was a reason for his dismissal."

The man certainly believes that he was dismissed because he was a safety representative. That charge was not pursued at the industrial tribunal. I checked to discover why and Mr. Steele's lawyers said the case for unfair dismissal was so strong and clear-cut in its own right that there was no point in pursuing victimisation because that is much more difficult to prove. If one were to lose that part of the case, one might lose the whole case for unfair dismissal. Therefore, the case was pursued simply on the ground of unfair dismissal. There is, however, little doubt

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

that Mr. Steele was sacked because he was a safety representative. In fact, the company has said so. The company tried to stop the man from receiving benefit after he had been sacked. It wrote to say that he was dismissed because he was a safety representative. It then tried to cover its back by claiming that his was an exemplary sacking. He was sacked because he was a safety representative and, although that was not victimisation, an example was made of him.

The company might be entitled to say that someone who breaches a safety regulation should not be a safety representative. That might have been a reasonable conclusion. It might also have been reasonable for the company to say to Mr. Steele, "Well, we no longer accept you as an elected safety representative." Further, it might have been all right for the company to tell those who elected him, "We have no more confidence in him as a safety representative, do you want fresh elections?" That at least would have been open and above board and it might have been sustainable if the matter had been handled in that way. However, what happened does nothing to dispel the widespread feeling offshore that to become a safety representative is to put one's head on the chopping block. Every excuse will be used to get rid of a safety representative. That is certainly true if trade unionists are involved in safety work. Sooner or later that leads to dismissal. Sooner or later an excuse will be found to get rid of those people.

If someone loses a job in those circumstances, it will be almost impossible to find another job. Companies put their hands on their hearts and swear that there is no victimisation or blacklist. They say that it is unfortunate that there is a downturn in the industry and there are not many jobs to go around. If a safety representative has been sacked and his face did not fit, companies say that it is just hard luck and coincidence that no other work is available. Many of the people affected are highly skilled and they have great experience of the industry. They find it very hard not to believe that such things are happening because they are safety representatives. It is not good enough for companies to behave in that way if they are to dispel the current climate of distrust.

Lord Cullen's recommendation 30 is quite unambiguous. It states:

> "Safety representatives should be protected against victimisation by a provision similar to Section 58(i)(b) of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 (para 21.86)."

That provision deals with trade union representation. It states that the dismissal of an employee shall be considered unfair if the reason for it is that the employee

> "had taken part, or proposed to take part, in the activities of an independent trade union at an appropriate time."

That provision has not been carried forward in the Bill any more than the issue of the protection of safety representatives. Given that recommendation 30 has not been implemented—it must be the only one that has not—one can hardly expect people to believe that there is no conspiracy within the industry to blacklist people. People have good grounds for believing that the Government have a marvellous opportunity to make major changes in legislation on offshore safety, but they have left it out of the Bill. People are saying that the Government are tacitly accepting that there can be blacklisting. The Government must do something.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): Lest there is any mistake, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not intend it, but I am concerned that he is using words such as "conspiracy". My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State made it very clear a few moments ago at the Dispatch Box that it was our intention to legislate thoroughly, comprehensively and effectively in this matter as soon as we properly can. His judgment and his advice was that this Bill was not an appropriate vehicle by which to do that. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept our good faith. It is our intention to legislate properly on this matter as soon as we reasonably can.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister for his intervention. It leads me to the point that I was about to make.

It will not do for the Government simply to say that they are not ignoring the recommendations on victimisation. It will not do for the Government to say that the Bill is not an appropriate medium. It is a totally false distinction that this is a safety Bill and that the protection of safety representatives and unionists is an employment measure. That just will not wash. All the rules and regulations, all the safety case assessments, and all the pious assertions that safety is paramount are hollow unless all those working offshore are fully committed to safety and unless all the trade unions and all those working offshore have confidence that their employment is not jeopardised if they commit themselves to exposing unsafe

Similarly, it is in the interests of good industrial relations if active trade unionists have protection from dismissal. We know that the Government's idea of good industrial relations is different from ours. Their idea of good industrial relations is either a non-union passive work force or a union work force who are passively willing to accept whatever indignities the employer wishes to impose upon them. A prerequisite for good industrial relations is the active participation of a vibrant and vigorous trade union movement. Such a trade union movement will lead to an improvement in the safety culture and confidence in the safety regime. It must be backed by strong anti-victimisation legislation to protect trade unionists in their general activities, not just in safety activities, because that is essential for safety representatives.

The Government have fallen down on the issue. I hope that they will amend the Bill accordingly. In today's proceedings, the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary said, "We have good faith; we would like to change it, but there are procedural difficulties." If there are procedural difficulties, they are of the Government's own making. The Government are responsible for drafting the long and short titles. The Bill states that it relates to health and safety matters "and connected purposes". Whether that would allow an amendment to be in order is neither here nor there. The Government could table an amendment to include an appropriate provision.

The Secretary of State, anxious to show how open-minded he is, fell into a trap of his own making. First, he said that Baroness Turner of Camden was bringing forward a Bill in another place to deal with that point. He said that her Bill was ineffective, deficient and technically incompetent and that therefore there was no route down that way. Secondly, he said that he did not want to put such a provision in this Bill because Baroness Turner's Bill provided a better avenue and a better approach. He cannot have it both ways. Either Baroness Turner's Bill is no good or it is. He argued himself into a corner.

However, I agree with the Secretary of State that there is no case for delay in implementing recommendation 30. He could still do so by amending the long and short titles. He knows that the safety culture and the whole issue of safety in the North sea is a matter of confidence, a matter of people being prepared to work together, and a matter of being prepared to show that they are serious about safety. Anything which leads people to a mood of distrust and fear is to be deprecated.

The Secretary of State has an opportunity with this Bill. Almost at a stroke he could dispel concern and fear by introducing legislation to put the matter right. He says that he wants to do it, but the only thing that is holding him up is the title of the Bill. It will not wash. That is a great pity. He has missed this opportunity to remedy a wrong which is long since overdue to be put right. Let him now use the opportunity to do so.

5.36 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): The House last debated offshore safety on 7 March last year. I felt then that there was a danger that everyone would think that gas and oil are available only from Scotland. I do not feel that that will be the case tonight, as there are so few Scottish Members present. I felt that it was important to emphasise then, and I do so again now, that there is an important sector of this great British industry——

Mr. Salmond *rose*——

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Porter: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Mr. Salmond: I am sure that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) will speak straight after me, but I assure the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) that——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman is not in a position to give such assurances. Will he get on?

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman must have noticed that while, admittedly, there is a sparse attendance on both sides of the House, there are four Opposition Members from Scotland present but there are no Conservative Members from Scotland present.

Mr. Porter: I had certainly noticed that, but the point that I was trying to make was that in the debate on 7 March, hon. Members spoke as though we were discussing a Scottish industry. The point that I made—there were some nods of agreement from Opposition Members—when we started to talk about moving the offshore safety division headquarters to Aberdeen was that there was and is a very important sector of the industry in the southern North sea—*[Interruption.]* I speak for the southern North sea sector, and that is the point that I am trying to make. It is clearly not as large as Scotland, but it makes a valuable contribution to the industry.

Locally, in my neighbouring port of Great Yarmouth and in my constituency port of Lowestoft, literally hundreds of jobs directly and indirectly depend on the offshore industry. Shell UK, for example, has been based at Lowestoft for more than 25 years. We reckon that it must have pumped directly and indirectly into the local economy more than half a billion pounds in that time. SLP—Sea-Land Pipelines—at Lowestoft has the biggest offshore module manfacturing capability south of Teesside. Clearly, that is another sector of the industry which is concerned about the Bill, and it is a big employer.

Smaller firms all over Waveney are dependent on the offshore industry. The offshore standby vessels that have been mentioned continue to employ large numbers of people, and Lowestoft has been the main base of the offshore standby industry ever since there has been such an industry. Equally, in Beccles, in my constituency, is the heliport of British International Helicopters, an absolutely vital part of the supplying, moving and equipping of the industry. Tragically, that company is one of those which have fallen victim to the grasping of the late Robert Maxwell. Coincidentally, I happen to be a member of the Select Committee on Social Security, which was considering occupational pensions when Robert Maxwell died. Now we are trying to do what we can to help BIH staff and others with their stolen pensions or—as I like to put it—we are trying to tear the mask off the unacceptable face of socialism. However, I stray from the Bill.

Since I became a Member of Parliament, and indeed before, I have heard the constant cry that there is some sort of conspiracy—the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) mentioned that word several times—to cut corners on safety among offshore operators and somehow to terrorise offshore workers into keeping silent on safety fears. We hear odd stories, but I challenge whether they are widespread. We hear stories at our surgeries, but are they truly widespread throughout the industry? Surely it is in no one's interests when there is an accident, or when a unit is put out of production or—in the case of Piper Alpha—is destroyed. The safety culture is not a luxury. It is not a bureaucratic imposition or an irrelevance. It is as essential as food and water. Surely we can all agree on that.

The Bill has rightly received a general welcome from all sides of the industry. I know that Shell was involved in ideas for its early drafting and, in so far as the Bill implements the Cullen recommendations, it will be absolutely accepted. Only when it is accepted will it be possible for it to work.

Tony Barrell, the chief executive of the Health and Safety Executive's new offshore safety division, reckons that the offshore industry

"presents a uniquely concentrated combination of hazards."

He feels that it is his job to achieve an improvement in safety and to apply a continuing improving influence, as we have already witnessed in the nuclear and chemical industries. Further, Mr. Barrell believes that commitment to safety has to begin at board level and that what is good for safety is good for business. If clear objectives for safety are set out and then achieved it will be accepted and will work. I especially welcome the HSE's plans to increase staffing. It has been said that it will be increased to more

[Mr. Porter]

than 400 in three years' time. A proportion of that number will be working on research and I understand that there will be a real increase in the number of inspectors.

The argument for operators to produce individual safety cases is won on the one count alone—if not on all the others—that everyone concerned is and has to be involved.

Some people feel that training is insufficient and the lack of workers' voices is an often expressed worry. From what I have heard about the filling in of a blank sheet of paper handed to the offshore safety division of the HSE, in the wake of Cullen, I believe that they have those challenges very much in mind.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the charter. There has been an outbreak of charters in the North sea. Thirty-five thousand copies of a charter of rights have been printed and circulated to all offshore workers. Rights have to be linked with responsibilities and that is what the document, "Safety Representatives and Safety Committees—A Guide for Offshore Personnel" does precisely. The United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association is committed to the document, believing that it should lay to rest some of the stories that we have heard again tonight about victimisation and lack of commitment to safety. Even the union, Manufacturing Science Finance, has given it a cautious welcome.

There is also a widespread worry that the decline of our merchant shipping fleet is being reflected in the offshore support and standby vessels sector. Crews are being replaced by large numbers of Portuguese and Norwegians. There are Danish, German, Dutch and even Russian and Yugoslavian boats in the business. The fear is that with language problems and different safety cultures from our own we could need some measure to protect the British sector. However, we know the experience of trying to do that for British fishing through the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 and its subsequent outlawing by the European Court. In any case, that is outside the Bill, but I felt that it was worth flagging up.

It is right for me to express a worry which has been mentioned widely in the other place. Since May 1991 the industry has been aware that the Government intended to introduce a security clause into the Bill—clause 5. The UKOOA view is that such legislation is unnecessary. The offshore industry has shown responsibility in the past in accepting proposals made by the security services for the provision of both physical forms of security and the establishment of security-related procedures and standards. It does not feel that such differences of opinion as may have arisen from time to time about the extent of those provisions need to have been dealt with by the blunt instrument which the Bill represents.

The upstream oil and gas industry is not a public service. It consists of private sector companies continuously involved in making economic judgments about the preservation of assets and the protection of employees. Many of them have to make such judgments on an international scale and are therefore familiar with international norms and risks. Therefore, they come from a background of informed analysis of their own position and interests. Anything thought to be necessary above such provisions is a matter for the Government's judgment and they think that it should be subject to Government funding.

The industry is also concerned about the possibility of the coverage of the legislation being extended as time moves on. They have been provided with an initial list of installations which will be subject to it, including 18 onshore terminals and refineries, most of which are not designated national economic key points. Several of those are in the downstream sector. We have to be aware that there is a tendency to add to such lists. They believe that that should be done formally between Government and the industry and that the reasons for the inclusion of any further installations on the list should be made explicit.

Finally, the industry is concerned about what it calls "tests of reasonableness" regarding the application of legislation to particular sites. If the question of Government funding is to be resolved, a reasonable process of cost benefit analysis has to apply to decisions taken through the legislation at the request of the security services.

It has been right to dwell on those matters in some detail as they were put to me by Shell in my constituency, because they are so important. For more than 25 years, while the offshore industry has made an increasing contribution to the national wealth, it has become more complex and bigger in size and value. It can only get more so in the next 25 years, so the Bill is timely. I join my hon. Friends and others in hoping that we can get it on to the statute book as speedily and as safely as possible.

5.45 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Like many other hon. Members, I have been calling for the transfer of offshore safety operations and their supervision from the Department of Energy to the Health and Safety Executive for a long time. Naturally, I welcome the fact that the Bill is formalising that process. Obviously my regret is that it was not done a great deal earlier. As I often said at the time, it was not necessarily a question of the Department of Energy being compromised, but that it was always seen to be compromised. That situation could not be sustained.

A number of hon. Members have properly referred to the fact that this legislation stems from Lord Cullen's report, which in turn stems from the tragedy of Piper Alpha. Those of us with constituents who were lost in that tragedy know too well that every time that that matter comes up for debate it reopens a great deal of agony and many wounds. It may seem a rather odd thing to say, but I hope that if there is any reporting of this debate the television companies will restrain themselves and will not again show films of that disaster. Every time that that happens we hear that it causes great distress to those who are left behind. We do not wish to provoke those feelings.

I do not know whether my constituency has more offshore workers than any other, but it certainly has a great many. Since I was elected the electorate in my constituency has increased from 56,000 to 80,000 in eight and a half years. That is almost entirely due to the oil-related expansion of the economy in north-east Scotland. Clearly a large number of the people who live in the constituency and who have moved there are offshore workers engaged in the offshore oil and gas industry.

It has become apparent in the industry in the past 10 years that it has moved from its infancy almost into middle age. A great many things have been learnt in that time, but a great many problems have been discovered which were not apparent in the early days and are now much more in the minds of people working in the industry. One practical fact is that many installations operating in the North sea have been there for a long time, which means that they have been subjected to a great deal of wear and tear and weathering. The problems of maintenance and consequential implications for safety are a matter of great concern. One hears some quite alarming stories on occasions about what companies may have to do to ensure the life of those platforms is maintained for the productive life of the oil and gas field on which they are located. One thing that has become apparent—the reason why I support the basis principle of the safety case approach—is that one has to create a climate of safety in both the design and operation of facilities which are used offshore. The safety case approach puts pressure on operators to consider every aspect of their designs and their operating facilities. It means that they must accept full responsibility for the techniques and procedures which are followed.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) reasonably said that he was not sure about that approach, although he said that he was not against it. He felt there was a great need for regulation, but the regulations in the Norwegian sector of the North sea have not always prevented accidents. People sometimes believe that such regulations automatically provide for safe operation. In a sense, that lowers their threshold of responsibility. There is room for both approaches, but I believe that the safety case approach is worth pursuing.

A number of incidents have been brought to my attention that suggest that the climate of safety in the North sea is a long way short of what we would want. It has deteriorated, partly because of the age of the industry and partly because of the consequences of the oil price collapse of about six years ago. Practices changed as a result of that collapse and that undermined morale and confidence among the oil companies and, much more important, among the suppliers, contractors and people involved in that side of the industry.

In an earlier intervention to the Secretary of State I raised the case of Mr. Colin Jewell, which has received publicity. He is a design engineer whose work relates to the North sea. He believes that nothing is done to consider the design of platforms from the outset and the safety implications of that. He was a member of a design team and he saw that there were immediate design problems with the work. One hundred engineers were involved in that design work and Mr. Jewell felt that none of them, if they were at all competent, could have failed to notice the inherent design faults in that work.

When Mr. Jewell attempted to draw attention to those faults, he was basically told, "We are paid to give the management the drawings that they want, not to question whether they will work." He raised the issue with the Health and Safety Executive in advance of the explosion on Fulmar Alpha, which confirmed the design fault that he had exposed and which had been built into other platforms in the process of design.

The HSE investigated Mr. Jewell's complaint, as he had failed to get it resolved internally, and upheld his findings. However, it was unable to do anything when he found himself effectively blacklisted from working in the North sea because of what he had done.

One of Mr. Jewell's proposals is that North sea design engineers should be subject to an independent code of practice, which makes them legally responsible for promoting good and safe design, and that they should not simply fulfil their contract to a company for which they work.

Reference has been made to the fact that there has been a development towards relatively short-term contracting whereby people are taken on to do a specific contract for a matter of weeks or months. Therefore, one does not need to blacklist a person; one simply does not renew his contract when it expires. One also lets it be known to others in the industry that he is not a desirable character to have on board because he is inclined to rock the boat or expose problems within the system. We must find a way in which to provide adequate protection as well as ensuring that people can be held responsible for their actions.

I must tell the Minister that what I am saying is not new—such cases have been reported extensively outside the Chamber. That is exactly the problem, because other people see what happens to those who complain. Consequently they keep their heads down and they do not complain. For that reason, the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) was able to ask whether such cases were widespread or odd examples. In one sense we will never know. One is led to believe that such problems are widespread, but most people are unwilling to put their heads on the chopping block. Who can blame them, especially given the current serious recession which means that alternative employment to that offered by the offshore industry is not as readily available as it was in the past?

The market climate and the skills shortages in the North sea are also important factors because they may enable companies to operate draconian regimes in terms of intimidating people who blow the gaff on matters of safety.

I do not accept that there is a conspiracy. Nobody is deliberately trying to suppress safety in terms of operation or design. It is in nobody's interest to do that. I accept that a major accident offshore is a disaster for management, shareholders, the work force and everyone else. However, if the climate and culture are not right, mistakes occur and the consequences can be catastrophic. I hope that the Bill will address the problems, but we are moving slowly. We have a long way to go before we establish a climate of safety in design operation in the North sea that will make us believe that major disasters will not happen again.

I regret to say that, in the past three or four years, we have had a series of incidents offshore that suggest that the problem is getting worse. In every case the problem seems to be one of a basic fault in design or in safety procedure, which is avoidable, but has not been avoided. I hope that the Minister will accept that we have not got anything like the safety regime established in the North sea that we need and to which we should reasonably and properly aspire.

It has been suggested to me that the Piper Bravo platform, which is not even in place yet, has design faults. I am not sure how such things can be properly confirmed or investigated. Some people argue that we do not seem to learn from mistakes.

The hon. Members for Waveney and for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) referred to helicopter operations and their safety. I am not sure, but I suspect that that is outside the scope of the Bill, because responsibility for helicopters rests with the Department of Transport. However, I hope that I will not be ruled out of order when I say that the problems of British International

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

Helicopters, whose operational headquarters are in my constituency at Aberdeen airport, is a matter for considerable concern. Inevitably that must have some potential implications for safety. I have been immensely impressed at the determination, fortitude and calmness of the pilots of those helicopters who operate a taxi service to and from the rigs and platforms in the North sea.

I am sure that, like me, other hon. Members have received letters from those pilots expressing concern about their futures. We must consider what is going on in the mind of a pilot aged either 51 or 52 who knows that he will be retiring in three years but does not know whether he will have any pension to retire on. It is a matter of urgency that that matter should be resolved, so that the future of the company can be resolved and so that the operating climate for its helicopters can be clarified. It is not in anyone's interests that that situation should continue for much longer. I hope that the Government will continue to use every measure at their disposal to bring the matter to a speedy conclusion. It is an awful mess.

Against that background it is important to consider the proposal for an offshore safety trust which I have put forward on a number of occasions, including when my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and I met the Minister. I am not convinced that the HSE can, as proposed in the Bill, meet all the safety considerations and provide the absolute safety valve for the people who need it. I am not sure that it can ensure that those people's complaints are addressed in confidence, that what can be learnt from those complaints is thoroughly investigated and that we can all benefit.

I have already quoted the example of one offshore worker who suffered as a result of taking his case to the HSE and who has now effectively lost employment in the North sea. The proposed oil industry safety trust parallels an established practice within the civil aviation industry which has been extremely beneficial. It has encouraged people to be honest and they have acknowledged that some practices were inherently unsafe and that something should be done about that. They have also acknowledged that they have experienced design faults and that they should be corrected. People are positively encouraged to go to an outfit in which they can have confidence.

Enough examples have already been given—the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred to some —of people who have gone to the HSE and found that by maintaining their anonymity they effectively cannot get their cases followed up. Only by revealing their identities can such people get cases followed up, and the consequence of that is that they are blacklisted and cannot get employment. We must get out of this vicious circle if we are to advance the safety of operations in the North sea.

The Bill is useful and builds on the findings of the Cullen inquiry. It is important, without in any way detracting from the value and qualities of the Cullen report, to recognise that, although it was a comprehensive inquiry into the consequences of one disaster, it did not cover every aspect of all operations and designs in the North sea. It would be dangerous for the Government to regard the Cullen report as the definitive blueprint for all safety operations in the North sea. I hope that the Minister will make it clear that that is not the case and that, valuable as Cullen is, there must be a much wider continuous review of safety operations in the North sea, and a willingness to bring forward whatever legislation is necessary to create a climate that will restore confidence in the safety operations in the North sea. That confidence has been shattered and all the evidence that many of us have from constituents working in the offshore industry shows that it has not been restored. Welcome though the Bill is, in itself it will not restore that confidence.

6 pm

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): I reinforce what the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said. The Bill is not a magic answer to the safety problems in the North sea.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the operation of helicopters. It is incumbent on us to ensure, with this move towards the Health and Safety Executive covering safety, that it will look at all aspects and not just at North sea offshore oil installations. That should include the standby vessels, about which there have been complaints this evening. Can we ensure that safety is looked at across the board? The "Herald of Free Enterprise" disaster taught us lessons and there are now better requirements for life jackets, for the regular testing of life rafts and the provision of them. I hope that the HSE will look at the transport implications as well, including back-up vessels, because safety is important across the board.

I am delighted that support for the Bill goes across the Floor of the House, although there is disagreement on one measure—the employment of safety representatives. I think that Opposition Members would like to see that always done through trade unions.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: No.

Mr. Dover: Well perhaps sometimes.

In 1989, Ministers made a commitment, which was endorsed by Lord Cullen, to review the operation of the 1989 regulations governing the appointment of offshore safety representatives. When the transfer of these responsibilities takes place, it will be up to the Health and Safety Commission to oversee the review and to decide whether to propose any changes to safety regulations. The commission considers that the review should be informed by an in-depth factual study of the practical workings of the regulations. The study will be commissioned shortly from an independent research organisation and is likely to last around nine months. We cannot dive in quickly and bring in a method of appointing safety representatives that applies onshore when that study must first be undertaken.

A major factor that must be taken into account is that there is limited trade union representation in the North sea industries. There is sometimes limited union recognition, which I deplore. I like to see trade unions in operation at the workplace, making sure that the working conditions and in particular the safety conditions for their members are of the highest standards. However, there are many subcontractors and myriad firms operating out there who do not have any trade unions to represent their work force. Therefore, we should be creating difficulties if we laid down that safety representatives had to come from, or be appointed through, trade unions.

Mr. Salmond: I note that the hon. Gentleman is sympathetic to trade union representation offshore. He will have seen the unanimous recommendation of the Select Committee on Energy—obviously, a recommendation approved by Conservative Members—that the

Government should clarify by what mechanism offshore workers can have ballots on trade union recognition. Will he add his voice to that call from the Select Committee?

Mr. Dover: I certainly add my voice to it. As a civil engineer for 20-odd years in the construction industry, admittedly mainly onshore, but often on rigs, I approve of trade union activities in all sectors, provided that they are constructive. It has been said in the debate that people cut corners on safety in order to cut costs, but in all my decades of experience, I have always found that the safest way is the cheapest way. It is of fundamental importance that safety matters are tackled in a workmanlike way, and the best way to do that is to have line managers who work hand-in-glove with the trade union representatives.

However, with the move to the HSE being responsible for these features in the North sea, I should like to add one proviso. Sometimes health and safety inspectors on building sites are not reasonable. They are academic and sometimes do not have much practical experience, but still lay down specific rules. I can give an example of this, although it is not connected with the North sea. Last week, a few miles outside my constituency, some cables had to be unearthed. The inspector accepted that everything had been done properly, but insisted that two steel spikes were put on each side of the high-voltage cable. That was a recipe for disaster. The third or fourth spike went through the cable and cut off the power supply for about a quarter of the town of Bolton. That shows how inspectors can sometimes be a hindrance rather than a help. I hope that they will play their part constructively in the North sea, which is such an unsafe working environment.

I have some reservations about clause 5, which says:

> "The Secretary of State shall lay before each House of Parliament a copy of every direction given . . . unless he is of the opinion that disclosure of the direction is against the interests of national security or the commercial interests of any person."

I should like to see the earliest possible laying down of directions if they are needed. We do not want the delay inherent in laying orders before both Houses of Parliament. That may take a month or two, when action should be taken at the workplace.

I am delighted to give my full backing to the Bill. I am a great one for preventing accidents and I am glad that the Government have endorsed all the recommendations of the Cullen report. I compliment the commission, which has done a marvellous job to ensure that safety in the North sea will improve all the time. I am pleased that we have made great progress since that most unfortunate accident.

6.8 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) said that he had considerable sympathy for trade union recognition in the workplace. For many trade unionists offshore, the objective is to obtain the same agreements with management that are enjoyed by their colleagues ashore. If employees in refineries can be taken into the trust of management and work on safety committees, the same should hold on the offshore platforms. BP, for example, has already recognised that there should be equality of treatment. Unfortunately, that does not hold for the whole of the offshore gas and oil industry, and that is a matter for considerable regret. I share the hon. Gentleman's opinion on that.

Is the Minister satisfied that the provisions in the Bill are wholly compatible with the relevant articles of the draft directive on the protection of workers in extractive industries? I refer to Com (91) of 493 final. I believe that I am right in saying that an amended version of that draft directive was sent to the Council on 13 January—I refer to Council document 4126/92. I believe that I am correct in saying that that has still to be considered by the Select Committee on European Legislation. I have been informed that the Department of Employment has still to provide the Select Committee with an explanatory memorandum on the directive. As the Minister is not disputing what I am saying, I take it that the Bill is wholly compatible with the provisions that are contained in the draft directive. Perhaps the Minister will respond to my question when he replies.

The Commission's amended draft states that the new proposal, which takes account of the European Parliament's report on the draft, has been amended to reflect the Piper Alpha disaster and Lord Cullen's excellent report, and especially the recommendations contained therein.

In terms of matching the Bill with the draft directive, the Commission appears to be of the view vis-a-vis the directive that maximum discretion, in line with the doctrine of subsidiarity, should be left to the member state when enacting legislation on safety in extractive industries, expecially the offshore industry. I ask the Minister to confirm that the Government intend to abide by the concept of subsidiarity when it comes to enacting the Bill.

Some of my constituents have complained bitterly about the cost of obtaining an offshore safety certificate. If the costs of travelling to Aberdeen and lodgings are taken into account, about £500 has to be found by those who are anxious to obtain a certificate. Many of the men in my constituency who are in that position are unemployed, but they still have to find the money. Why cannot the local enterprise companies or the Department meet the cost of this essential training certificate? It seems that the LECs or the Department could provide much more assistance.

I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State confirm that the provisions of clause 1 are designed to protect both divers and the crews of standby vessels. Last week I asked the Minister for Shipping about custom-built standby vessels. Everyone taking part in the debate knows that the fleet of standby vessels is an ageing one. There are still far too many side trawlers working in the North sea. For understandable reasons, the side trawlers are known on Humberside and elsewhere as side winders. These vessels are too old. I accept that they have been converted, but some of them were built in the 1950s and 1960s.

Two Departments are involved with standby vessels. First, there is the Department of Employment, which is responsible for the Bill, but the Department of Transport, too, has a deep involvement. I am concerned that some laudable objectives might not be realised because two Departments are involved. I would prefer the operations of standby vessels to come wholly within the remit of the Health and Safety Executive.

Last week, I asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the vessels were custom built. He replied:

> "The number of vessels certificated for the first time for use in the United Kingdom standby industry in the past three years were eight vessels in 1989, 24 in 1990 and 30 in 1991. Of these vessels the vast majority, some 61 vessels, were converted for the purpose. Only one was purpose built as a standby vessel and this may not have been directly for the

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United Kingdom industry, but may have previously served as a standby vessel in Norway or elsewhere. No custom-built vessels were constructed in United Kingdom shipyards".—[*Official Report*, 3 February 1992; Vol. 203, c. *39*.]

That matter causes me deep regret. We have specialist shipyards that can easily produce such vessels, and they are required by the industry. There is a fleet of 200 and I think that I am right in saying that this year about 70 of the older vessels will have to be laid off or scrapped. In fact, some of them were already tied to the quay. Their scrapping will not be before time, and I am sure that the House is aware that Lord Cullen was deeply critical of this fleet of vessels, and particularly of the Silver Pit. He praised the remarkable bravery of the crew of that vessel, but took the view that it should not have been crewing such an inappropriate vessel. In other words, that old side trawler should not have been operating as a standby vessel. Lord Cullen said:

> "I strongly urge that the standard of the existing SBV fleet"—

that is the standby vessel fleet—

> "is improved with despatch, although it is obvious that this cannot be done at once."

I know that progress is being made, but there are still major problems with the standby fleet. If the Secretary of State is correct in saying that the standby crews and their vessels come within the ambit of clause 1, I think that I am in order in concentrating my brief remarks on these vessels.

Recommendations 88 and 90 of the Cullen report are, in effect, demands for changes in the regulations and are aimed at improving the quality of standby vessels. That is how it should be. To be fair, some standby vessel operators have sought to make improvements to their vessels. They have made every effort to meet the new regulations. Speaking as a former shipwright, I accept that many of their vessels are of an acceptable standard. I am told, however, that at a ceremony in Aberdeen for the renaming of the standby vessel Cam Viking, the managing director of Cam Shipping, Mr. Bruce Claridge, complained about companies that were getting away with chartering vessels that did not meet the requirements of the new regulations. If what Mr. Claridge said is accurate, it is a matter of considerable concern.

The Minister may say that that is a matter not for his Department but for the Department of Transport. If that is so, I urge him to bring my remarks to the notice of his ministerial colleagues. Mr. Claridge has made a serious complaint in the light of what happened to the poor souls on Piper Alpha and to the poor and remarkably brave souls on the Silver Pit. If the accusation has merit, as I believe it has, it should be investigated.

It has also been brought to my attention that the oil and gas companies are imposing low charter rates on the standby vessel operators. Those rates are putting severe cost restraints on the operation of standby vessels. That is the view of the offshore industry liaison committee and it was also the view expressed in the Aberdeen petroleum report of 5 February. It said that the standby vessel operator Farstad UK's new deal on terms and conditions for crews meant that they would suffer a reduction in their wages. Having spent many thousands of pounds in bringing its vessels up to and beyond the requirements of the new regulations, the company had to reduce costs because of the low charter rates being imposed by the client companies.

That is a serious allegation, not against the standby vessel operator but against the offshore oil and gas companies. If they are inflicting low charter rates on standby vessels, and if that results in a diminution in the terms and conditions of employment, how on earth can we expect those crews to show loyalty to their employers or to be motivated as they go about their difficult work? Cutting wages in that way, even in such a deep recession, will lead to a high turnover in the crews of standby vessels. It may also lead to companies cutting their training programmes for the crews.

I have never forgotten the time when, 12 or 13 years ago, a standby vessel lost a man overboard. The vessel was so poorly equipped that the fatal accident inquiry in Aberdeen was told that it took the crew 30 minutes to get the man back on board. Everyone in Aberdeen knows about that scandalous case. The man was the mate on that vessel, but even his own crew could not rescue him. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) can confirm that he died of hypothermia.

Farstad UK acknowledges that, because of the low rates being imposed on standby vessel operators, costs have to be reduced. Farstad's deputy managing director, Captain Peter Maudsley, is reported as having said:

> "Keeping crews of our standby vessels on the same terms and conditions as the rest of our fleet proved impossible."

It is a deeply disturbing position. Cutting wages diminishes both motivation and loyalty and it increases labour turnover. The standby vessels and their crews should be seen as integral elements of the productive activities offshore. If that means the Department of Transport giving up some of its responsibilities to the HSE, so be it.

Many standby vessels will have to leave the fleet before the end of the year, and in a way that will be a blessing. We need a highly efficient fleet that meets the recommendations laid down by Lord Cullen, the first of which—recommendation 89—was that there must be a high degree of manoeuvrability. Side trawlers, even with bow thrusters installed, do not meet that requirement. The safety case approach should include standby vessels.

I welcome the Bill, but with some reservations. It seeks to enhance safety offshore and to punish those who place their employees in danger. One reservation is that the Bill fails to deal with the genuine and legitimate fear of victimisation, which is being experienced by many people offshore. Time and again, people at my surgeries say to me, "I dare not speak up because I will lose my job and if I come back to Inverclyde I will never get a job in this area." That fear must be acknowledged and measures must be generated to deal with that. Men must have not only confidence in their employers but pride in their work.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that it is within the knowledge of some hon. Members that a tragic explosion has taken place in the dock at Grangemouth. Up to eight people are missing and others have severe burns. I think that the Scottish Office industry Minister is aware of the incident. I wonder whether it would be appropriate for the Government to make a statement at some stage this evening, at the Government's choosing.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The Treasury Bench has heard what the hon. Gentleman said.

I cannot take the matter any further at this stage, other than to say that no request has been received, as yet, for a statement to be made.

6.26 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Earlier, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) appealed to the press to use some discretion in its coverage of tonight's debate on the ground that scenes from the Piper Alpha incident inevitably would be harrowing for the relatives of those involved. That is true, and many of my constituents are in that position. However, it is most important that there is coverage of tonight's debate because the most pressing danger is that of complacency creeping into both the activities of the offshore industry and our proceedings tonight. It is not without significance that throughout the debate there have never been more than half a dozen hon. Members on either side of the House.

As was said earlier, since the Piper Alpha incident there has been a succession of serious incidents in the North sea, although obviously not on the same scale as Piper Alpha. Nevertheless, they have been potentially major incidents. The statistics for "dangerous occurrences" show that they have been increasing during the past few years—so there is no ground for complacency.

An industry that deals with petroleum products tends, by its nature, to be inherently dangerous. As the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said, news is coming through about a serious incident in Grangemouth tonight. I join with the hon. Gentleman in saying that we would appreciate a statement to Scottish Members at some point. The North sea industry is also inherently dangerous and there can be no complacency in the safety regime that we are imposing upon it.

There is a danger that, three and a half years after the Piper Alpha tragedy, some of the scenes—although etched on the memory—are fading from front-line political significance. If we judge the commitment to offshore safety by the amount of money that is spent on it, it would be a strong indictment of the level of concern of this House and of the Government. During the 1980s, only a tiny fraction of 1 per cent. of Government revenue from the North sea was spent on implementing and enforcing the safety regime in the North sea. Even on the increased expenditure levels expected by 1994-95, it is probable that only 1 per cent. of Government revenue will be expended on enforcing the new, beefed-up safety regime in the North sea. If we project that against total revenues expected in that year, it amounts to about one single day of revenue being allocated to the budget to implement the safety regime in the North sea.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) for interrupting his speech. I refer to the serious incident in my constituency. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for raising with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, the question whether a Government statement can be made later tonight. I have been in contact with the authorities, and particularly with the police in my constituency, who have been as helpful as they can in all the circumstances. Obviously, the emergency services are run off their feet. I hope that it will be possible—though I shall understand if it is not—for a Minister to come to the House to say something about that major incident, which involved the jetty at Grangemouth, which is part of the dock and BP complex.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised a point of order on that matter a few moments ago—but as the hon. Member for Falkirk, East represents the constituency concerned, it is understandable that he wants to raise it again, and in a most helpful manner. I repeat that, at this stage, Mr. Speaker's Office has not been informed that a Minister wants to make a statement. One may come later—we must wait and see.

Mr. Salmond: A number of right hon. and hon. Members' constituencies include major petroleum production facilities, so I am sure that we all share the concern and anxiety felt by the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing). A statement would be appreciated by right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House.

I was making the point that if we judge concern for safety by the money spent on it, then by any measurement or definition, it is a sad indictment of the official concern expressed in the 1980s. A mere fraction of North sea revenues is to be spent on enforcing the safety regime.

When the Select Committee on Energy took evidence, many oil companies said that a huge amount is currently being expended on safety. The Committee was given a figure for new safety expenditure arising from the Cullen report of £850 million, perhaps rising even to £5,000 million over the next 10 to 15 years.

Later evidence established that 70 to 80 per cent. of that expenditure will come from the Exchequer through offsets against petroleum revenue taxation. We are talking not about an industry in decline—no matter what some right hon. and hon. Members may think—but about one in which oil and gas production will rise from more than 2 million barrels a day now to a new peak of almost 3 million barrels a day by the end of the century.

There will be many more production platforms established as smaller accumulations are identified and exploited in the North sea. Because of that, the cost of supervising and enforcing even the new goal-related safety regime will be higher. I am not convinced that, even on the projected budget for the mid-1990s, the budgetary emphasis on safety can yet be considered adequate.

The Bill's provisions are not controversial. It has widespread support in the House as far as it goes, but missing is legislation to protect against victimisation. With respect to the Secretary of State, I believe that most right hon. and hon. Members found very unconvincing his explanation as to why such a provision could not form part of the Bill.

That goes hand-in-hand with the case made for trade union involvement in oil and gas industry activities. Lord Cullen believed that his remit did not allow him to move too far into the question of labour relations, and said so in paragraph 21.83 of his report. However, even given that restriction, the report gave more than a nod and a wink in the direction of the collective security that trade unions could provide if they nominated members of safety committees.

As a member of the Select Committee, I was extremely concerned when Mr. Rimington, Director General of the Health and Safety Executive, revealed in his evidence that he had not been aware of the restrictions that Lord Cullen

[Mr. Salmond]

felt had been placed upon him in respect of investigating labour relations. Lord Cullen's point that trade union involvement gives an enhanced feeling of collective security to offshore employees is one that should be widely recognised.

I am not necessarily holding any brief for some of the activities of certain unions with members working in the North sea. My own view is that, with one honourable exception in the Manufacturing Science Finance union, most of the unions involved in the North sea have not always represented their members effectively, and part of the present response made by the offshore industry liaison committee on moving to trade union status is a reaction to that situation.

None the less, all Select Committee members felt some frustration in trying to identify which procedures would allow offshore workers to apply for trade union recognition, and enforce the general wish for union recognition upon employers. We have received no convincing answers either from UKOOA or the Government as to the procedure that needs to be observed to ensure that offshore workers not only enjoy the right to be trade union members but can have their trade unions recognised by their employers.

In conjunction with the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), as a member of the Select Committee, I visited a BP platform. The company extended good facilities to speak to its employees and to members of the platform's safety committee in private. A number of issues arose that emphasised the difficulties that safety committees encounter because of the absence of trade union representation.

It should be said that the platform in question was a good, functioning platform, and the safety committee was in general happy with its work and remit, and with the employer's response. However, the committee pointed out that in the absence of trade union involvement, it often found itself faced with broader issues of terms and conditions. The committee was becoming caught up in issues that did not fall within its remit. That is another argument for the clarification of how offshore workers should go about securing trade union rights and recognition.

Dr. Godman: The confusion to which the hon. Gentleman refers does not exist at any of the BP refineries that I have visited.

Mr. Salmond: Yes, I am sure that is so. The Select Committee made the point that, if onshore workers have certain rights, offshore workers should, all the more so, enjoy the same rights. No convincing reason has been given for treating onshore and offshore workers differently —often by the same company.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is the hon. Member aware that the companies argue that responsibility lies not with them but with their contractors? We pointed out to the companies that they let the contracts, and could therefore require trade union representation as a condition of awarding them.

Mr. Salmond: I agree. It is similarly unconvincing for UKOOA to say that it is not within its remit to consider trade union or labour relations when the Select Committee was presented with a previous UKOOA agreement and understanding dating from the 1970s, which dealt with exactly these points. Unfortunately, it was never implemented.

As to discrimination, we are not necessarily talking about someone being fired, sacked, or NRB'd. There are many more subtler forms of exerting pressure and discrimination. An employee might believe that his promotion prospects hung on the extent of his activity in pushing for trade union recognition or safety provision.

An offshore worker has presented me with a detailed file containing his experiences as a safety representative. I shall not mention his name, for obvious reasons, but his case is now being considered by the HSE. As is well documented in the case evidence, that worker was not suddenly sacked but was transferred to another platform without reasonable cause. When unhappy circumstances befell him, he was treated differently from other employees in the same circumstances. He believes that the subtle discrimination practised on him resulted from his active role in a North sea safety committee.

Whatever Conservative Members may believe, I can assure them that there is a climate of fear among offshore workers who believe—rightly or wrongly, but I think rightly—that many employees are subject to discrimination because companies or contractors consider that they have placed too much emphasis on safety matters.

Another notable example relates specifically to some of the points made in the case study to which I have just referred. When Shell and UKOOA—representing all the major companies—appeared before the Select Committee, they were astonished that anyone should suggest that they, as operators of various North sea fields, could not be approached by any employee, regardless of whether that person was employed directly by a company or employed by a contractor.

As the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) has pointed out, about a quarter of offshore workers are employed by the major companies, while the remaining three quarters work for contractors. It is clear, however, that in this case the contracting company felt extremely nervous when it found that representatives of a safety committee had gone straight from the employer to the ultimate operator in the field. Its anxiety and the pressure that was placed on the safety committee representatives speak volumes: they reveal that not everyone is treated equally in the North sea, and that, on some North sea installations, there is still a marked divergence between the recourse available to those working for the operator and that accorded to those working for contracting companies.

My final point relates to the penalties that will be employed when North sea workers are eventually given some sort of legislative protection against victimisation. When I asked earlier what those penalties might be, I was fobbed off with the answer that the matter would be referred to the industrial tribunal, and that the worker involved might receive some form of compensation.

Perhaps, if Ministers are preparing legislation, they will take note of my view. I believe that, if it is established through a proper investigation that a company has been victimising workers for reporting safety concerns, that company—whether it is a contractor or an operator—must be in exactly the same position as an employee who has jeopardised the safety of a platform. Given that such an employee would face dismissal if that were proven, a company should face no less than severe curtailment of its operations across the North sea.

Unless we, as legislators, are prepared to treat such circumstances with that degree of seriousness, rather than allowing fines even in the low thousands to be imposed, we are unlikely to secure the safety culture to which North sea workers are, sadly, not accustomed but are certainly entitled.

6.43 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I wish to make three points. First, I believe that I speak for a number of my hon. Friends when I say that we want the Bill to reach the statute book, come what may, in view of the approaching general election, and I hope that it will be given a fair wind. If it is thought that the politicians have dithered in any way, we shall be slaughtered on the anvil of public opinion and informed opinion in the oil industry. People will ask, "Are they more concerned with their politics than with recommendations that must be implemented as a matter of urgency?"

Mr. Robert Hughes: I hope that my hon. Friend will dispel any notion that the Secretary of State may have sought to introduce to the effect that the passage of the Bill would be seriously delayed if we examined the important question of victimisation. The Bill could, with our support, be amended speedily, and we certainly will not hold it up in any circumstances.

Mr. Dalyell: That brings me to the second issue that I wish to discuss—the question of anonymity, which the Secretary of State mentioned several times in his opening speech.

According to my experience—and, I believe, that of my hon. Friends the Members for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond)—there is no such thing as anonymity. We find, in our day-to-day constituency work, that if we complain we are asked—quite understandably—to produce more facts: we are asked for the basis of the complaint. If we give the basis of the complaint, however, it is very easy for employers to look down the list and find out which employee comes from Linlithgow, Greenock and Port Glasgow, Aberdeen, North or Banff and Buchan. It is not difficult to put two and two together.

I do not say that people "have it taken out of them" for making a complaint at the time when that complaint is made, but there may be a problem the next time something happens. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan mentioned promotion, for instance. All these things enter into such considerations, and the proverbial black mark may be recorded. It is very difficult to pursue an issue when it is impossible to produce a detailed case. Ministers should take on board this message from those of us who speak for people with whom we come into contact in our day-to-day work: something must be done about victimisation, and it must be done quickly. It cannot be postponed.

I cannot stand here and say, "You will not get your Bill through unless you do something about victimisation." That would be a very empty threat. I believe, however, that when it is felt almost unanimously in the House of Commons that something should be done—on a "no-line Whip"—Governments have at least a moral obligation to answer questions properly.

My final question is rather more specific. It relates to recommendation 57 of the Cullen report. Let me yet again express the view that Lord Cullen and his staff have produced a document of world-class significance—in, given the circumstances, a remarkably short time. In view of the time that other reports have taken to produce—I attended day 167 of the Layfield committee inquiry on Sizewell recently—it is enormously to Lord Cullen's credit that he has produced such a detailed and worthwhile document so quickly.

Paragraph 57 says:

> "For the purpose of maintaining breathable air within the accommodation, it should be required by regulation that the ventilation air intakes should be provided with smoke and gas detectors and that on smoke or gas alarm the ventilation and dampers should be shut down".

That refers to paragraphs 19.171 and 19.172. Paragraph 19.171 states:

> "The need for an integrated approach is illustrated by the ventilation system. It is clearly essential that smoke should not be sucked into the accommodation through the ventilation intakes. On the other hand, positive pressure maintained by the ventilation system allows the use of air locks to prevent smoke entering through main entrance and evacuation doors. The power supply for the ventilation system introduces another factor, since it is essential that emergency power to other functions in the accommodation should not be jeopardised. In short, the ventilation system needs to be thought through to minimise the chance either of its being ineffective or defeated or of its actually making things worse."

Paragraph 19.172 states:

> "There is, however, one specific measure which I am satisfied I should support. The air intakes of the ventilation system should be provided with hydrocarbon gas and smoke detectors and on alarm the ventilation and dampers should shut down. I note that the draft fourth edition of the guidance notes to the Construction and Survey Regulations contains provisions on this matter."

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) and other colleagues know what it is to which I refer. It arises from constituency surgeries. Very considerable concern has been expressed about the ventilation systems, not least in relation to the lavatories on some of the platforms.

I do not intend to go into too much detail. The Department knows the precise field to which I refer. I shall tell the Minister afterwards. I hope that he will be able to say that great attention is now being given to Lord Cullen's concerns about the ventilation systems.

6.51 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): This debate, which essentially arises out of the Piper Alpha disaster, has been given even greater poignancy due to the reports that we have received of a major explosion at Grangemouth. Points of order have been raised, asking for a statement tonight. The Opposition appreciate, however, that it may be premature for the issue to be raised in Parliament tonight while there is uncertainty. However, may I ask the Minister to take on board the fact that it would be appropriate for a statement to be made to the House tomorrow.

The debate is important and has led to keen observations being made on both sides of the House. I repeat what my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said: the Opposition have absolutely no

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

intention of trying to block the Bill. It is an important Bill even if, as it stands, we believe that it needs to be improved. It is also important because it arises out of the death of 167 people in 1988 after the Piper Alpha explosion. It is important, too, because it arises out of Lord Cullen's report which focused on other accidents in the oil industry, and elsewhere, as well as on the Piper Alpha accident.

The Cullen report is widely recognised as one of the most excellent reports that has ever been produced on matters that affect industrial safety. The report is important because it makes it clear that where safety is not given priority by both management and the regulatory authorities—in this case the Department of Energy and the Government—things begin to go badly awry. The Minister said earlier today that he hoped it would be accepted that the Government had come to the House in good faith. However, we judge the Government's good faith in terms of their track record.

In many ways it has considerable weaknesses. I point to the fact that both the Department of Energy, in its failure to prioritise safety within the oil industry, and more generally the Government, supported by Conservative Members, in their consistent failure throughout the 1980s to provide a framework for safety, contributed to a number of major disasters. Piper Alpha is significant tonight, but the Herald of Free Enterprise and the King's Cross disasters can be attributed, to a considerable extent, to the Government's failure to give priority to safety. Faced with the pressure resulting from those disasters, we know that the Government have begun to try to undo some of the damage. However, the rising level of deaths and serious injuries in industry generally is a matter of great shame to us all, but it is a matter of great shame in particular for those who can be held to be responsible. There is an enormous cost in terms of both human tragedy and the economic implications, through days lost through sickness and ill health. The provision of an overall health and safety regime is considerably less today than it once was. That ought to concern us all.

I hope that the Minister is able to deny newspaper reports about the Government's attitude to safety. According to those reports, almost incredibly the Government are even now considering the privatisation of the electrical equipment certification service. That service did a considerable amount of work after the explosions on Piper Alpha. Since then, the service has been greatly involved in the certification of electrical motors on offshore oil and gas platforms in order to ensure that that area of danger is minimised. In the light of Government protestations that safety is of the highest order, the idea that that service should be privatised is brought into focus. Is the Minister in a position to confirm that the Government intend to privatise that important part of the health and safety regime? If it is true, I repeat that it does not square up with the Government's protestations about their concern for safety.

Safety in the oil industry in general is still far from perfect. I understand that during the past 12 months there have been three gas leaks, two in the southern sector and one in the northern sector. The leaks had great similarities with Piper Alpha. Thankfully, they did not lead to the same tragic results. We know that the Government still justify regulation dispensations for the oil industry. I refer to a parliamentary answer that was given to me by the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth). I asked under what circumstances dispensations from the health and safety regulations were given by the Department to offshore oil companies. The Minister replied:

> "Each application is carefully considered and only granted subject to equivalent or higher alternative safety arrangements being in place."—[*Official Report*, 22 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. *266*.]

North sea operators are given dispensations, not only when there are equivalent or higher alternative arrangements in place but in some cases when it is well known to the authorities that the platforms are operating at a level that would not be allowed if they were completely new platforms. I refer the Minister to the specific case of the Amoco Montrose platform—now, thankfully, closed—which was given dispensation for nine years although it was known that the accommodation facilities did not meet the fire regulation standards that apply to platforms. However, it had been built when the new fire regulations had been well trailed. We cannot accept seriously the argument that an overwhelming case can be made that the Government regard safety as a matter of the greatest priority.

The most important single factor in terms of the Cullen report and the Bill is, inevitably, the movement of responsibility for health and safety in the oil industry to the Health and Safety Executive. We welcome that. It is right and proper that there should be one regulatory agency. Furthermore, it finally resolves the conflict between the Department of Energy, as the producer Department, and the Department of Energy as the Department that is responsible for monitoring safety. I draw the attention of the House and of Ministers to the fact that in that context it seems to make no sense whatsoever that one regulatory authority responsible for safety—the maritime inspectorate—should still remain within the Department of Transport. I hope that the Ministers will seriously consider that the time has come to tidy up that particular aspect of health and safety.

One of the Cullen report's most important contributions to safety has been the development of the concept of a safety case. That is widely accepted by all those involved in health and safety both in Britain and throughout the world. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made an important point when he referred to the need for health and safety to be designed in from the beginning. It is quite obvious that in many cases health and safety cannot be bolted on, as an afterthought, to the basic design. That is why the concept of the safety case—a case going back to the very essentials of design—is so important.

I want to put a specific question to the Minister. It is clear that, in the development of the safety case regime, time is of the essence. I hope that that is accepted on both sides of the House. We recognise the complexity of the situation and the fact that there is a shortage of skills, so we make no criticism of the time that this process has taken. It is to be hoped that everything possible is being done to bring forward the safety regime as quickly as possible. It is likely that outside consultants will be employed by the Health and Safety Executive. If so, a conflict may well arise between the work of the consultants in their capacity as testers of design for the private operators and what they do for the HSE to determine whether the safety case is well established. It is not a conflict which will lead inevitably to problems, but it should be recognised at an early stage and rectified by the Government.

The safety case regime in the North sea is based to a considerable extent on the CIMAH regulations—the major accident hazard regulations as applied to industry on land. At present, only 18 people in the Health and Safety Executive are working on those regulations, and even though the provisions have been in operation for about two and a half years, fewer than one third of the safety cases have been accepted as being proper working documents. We welcome the emphasis on safety in the North sea, but we expect a parallel prioritisation of the extremely dangerous potential accident sites onshore, and we expect to see an improvement in that situation.

In the Cullen report and in the House today we have witnessed an important debate about the role of safety representatives. It will come as no surprise to the Minister to hear that we have always taken the view that safety representatives are at their best when backed by a trade union, of whose resources and training they are able to take advantage. If I pursue this issue, the Minister will refer me, as the Secretary of State referred the Select Committee, to the current review of the safety representatives and of the safety committee regulations. While I accept that, I have to say that we expect those undertaking the review to have complete power to look into all areas and, specifically, to consider whether safety representatives who are not backed by a trade union are in a position to give the same kind of expert advice as would be expected from safety representatives appointed by a trade union. If the review is to command the support of all sides of industry it must be seen as being thorough and in-depth. Otherwise it will be flawed. It would be helpful if the Minister could indicate when the whole review process is likely to be completed. It seems that matters have fallen behind schedule and need to be put back on the rails.

Many issues have been raised in this debate. Obviously victimisation is a very relevant matter, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) made a number of important points. I do not want to go over that ground again; suffice it to say that we accept the Secretary of State's assurance that the Government are making a genuine effort to find a mechanism to implement Lord Cullen's recommendation 30.

The Select Committee drew attention to the under-reporting of accidents in the oil industry. Clearly, part of that under-reporting comes down to the fear of victimisation. Surely there can no longer be any argument about the fact that the RIDDOR regulations, which make compulsory the reporting of all serious onshore accidents, should be applied directly offshore or be paralleled by the introduction of equivalent offshore regulations. The House would welcome a statement that the Government intended to pursue that line.

Another important area in terms of safety in the offshore industry is the COSHH regulations, which all parties in this House claim is one of the great steps forward in health and safety provision in this country. Of course, the COSHH regulations do not apply offshore, and the Minister ought to consider whether it is time to provide such protection for those who work in the offshore industry.

We shall save for the Committee stage the debate about the level of penalties that are appropriate under the Bill. It is important that we accept that the central thrust of the measure is about the offshore industry. The Bill arises very much out of the Piper Alpha incident. Many lives were lost in that incident, and we have an obligation to the 30,000-odd people working in the industry, as well as those who lost loved ones in the tragedy. We must provide a framework for an enduring safety regime for the offshore industry.

We intend to ensure that the Bill passes speedily. In no circumstances shall we frustrate its progress. On that basis I hope that we can look to the Government to ensure that recommendation 30 of the Cullen report is implemented simultaneously. That is a matter of great importance. If we can have such an assurance we shall be able, for once, to say that the Bill has bipartisan support.

7.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): This has been a serious and well-informed debate, arising, as many hon. Members have said, from one of the most serious and tragic accidents that we have experienced in our generation. Hon. Members on both sides, particularly those whose constituents were most directly affected, have made valuble contributions to the debate. Indeed, we have seen the House at its best.

With regard to the incident at Grangemouth, to which two or three hon. Members have referred, I should say that we are receiving information almost by the minute. Indeed, the situation changes every time we receive further word. The location and seriousness of the incident are still in some doubt. I am sure that one of my ministerial colleagues will want to inform the House tomorrow. Health and Safety Executive inspectors are already on their way to the scene. I hope that Opposition Members accept that were we to attempt a rushed account this evening it would of necessity be incomplete. I am sure that hon. Members would prefer to hear a more considered account tomorrow. It is such an account that my colleagues would prefer to give. I hope that that is acceptable to all hon. Members.

In the time available to me I shall answer as many as possible of the points that have been raised. If I should miss any, I shall write to the hon. Members concerned as soon as possible—if possible, before the commencement of the Committee stage so that any information that I can give may be used in Committee.

At a very early stage the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) raised the question of resources. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the offshore safety division is a separate, discrete, independent division of the Health and Safety Executive. All the posts in it are additional. There have been some temporary secondments to ensure that the division is staffed as effectively as possible and that the experience available is as approprite as may be. However, the officers are all additional. To date, 84 are in post, and 51 offers of posts have been made. So we are well on the way to achieving the recruitment targets that have been set with a view to making the decision as effective as possible.

Clause 5 was commented on by the hon. Member for Sedgefield and by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter). I wish to make it clear that it is a safety net clause which follows on similar provisions made for the telecommunications, electricity and water industries. Experience has taught us that it has not been

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necessary to invoke the similar or parallel provisions made for those industries. It is not envisaged that we would have to use them for the offshore industry, but the provisions provide a safety net.

We see no conflict between security and safety. The hon. Member for Sedgefield questioned the commercially sensitive nature of the provision. There will be no compromise between safety and commercial motivation, but occasionally the divulging of information might be commercially damaging to the business involved. I do not think that anyone would believe that that was either necessary or sensible. Therefore, there is no conflict between commercial viability or motivation and safety, but we believe that the security of the installations and of those who work in them should be a legitimate purpose of the Bill and the provisions in clause 5. I hope that all hon. Members will accept that that is the motivation behind the clause; it is a last resort provision which we hope will not be required.

I shall try to allay hon. Members' understandable anxieties about the subject of victimisation. I shall not mention each one individually, but almost all contributors to the debate have touched on the issue and made no secret of their concern. Indeed, they made the extent of their anxiety explicitly clear. I regret that there was some suspicion in the minds of Opposition Members.

It is important to make it clear that, within the existing regime, if a safety representative has been victimised to the point of being unable to carry out his functions as a safety representative, the installation operator and owner would be in breach of the Offshore Installations (Safety Representatives and Safety Committees) Regulations 1989. In that case, enforcement action could be taken under that provision.

If safety standards are threatened by the alleged or actual act of victimisation, offshore safety division inspectors have the powers, under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, to issue improvement and prohibition notices. They have further powers, under the Mineral Workings Acts, to require improvements to be made or an activity to be stopped. In that sense, powers exist to cover that issue.

Mr. Dalyell: How often have those powers been used?

Mr. Forth: From memory, I believe that six incidents have been reported in the past year. A number of investigations have been made by the Health and Safety Executive. As has been mentioned, one problem is that, when such cases have gone to tribunal, there has not been an overwhelming success——

Mr. Dalyell: Of course.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman says, "Of course". The hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) spent some time describing in detail cases with which they were familiar. As tribunals are totally independent of Government and are judicial organisations, they must have the power—and the House must respect that power—to investigate such matters and come to a conclusion. It is a bit unfair of Opposition Members to ask Ministers to make judgments on or second guess what tribunals do. That cannot be our role.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister is always making the case there there is no need for legislative change. I hope that he will veer away from that argument and say why legislative change is needed. If he were a safety representative on a platform and, without explanation, he were transferred to another platform run by the same operator or service company, how would an industrial tribunal or any other organisation be able to prove that the reason for his transfer was that he was making a nuisance of himself over safety matters? How does the Minister intend to deal with that?

Mr. Forth: That constraint would apply to almost any regime. The hon. Gentleman is unfair to claim that we have said that we shall not take action. My right hon. and learned Friend has said more than once, and I have repeated it, that it is the Government's avowed intention to deal with that subject. However, we want to take the right action, and to do so properly and comprehensively. Our view, and the advice given us, is that the Bill does not represent a suitable way to deal with that problem.

We share the desire of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) to get the Bill on the statute book before any interruptions caused by imminent events. In order to do so, given the stage that the Bill has reached, it would be risky to start seeking to extend its scope or coverage, play with the long or short titles or introduce new sectors in the Bill, for whatever reason. Not only would there be great procedural difficulties in doing so, but there would be political difficulties. We want to guide the Bill through all its stages and for it to be properly scrutinised in Committee. With the help of Opposition Members, who have generously said that they will help, we hope to see the Bill on the statute book as soon as possible. I do not want to do anything to jeopardise that process. Therefore, my right hon. and learned Friend has given an undertaking that we shall proceed with legislation as soon as it is reasonable to do so, but the Bill is not the appropriate way.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I took the opportunity in the interval between speaking and listening to the Minister's wind-up to consult "Erskine May" on the subject of changing Bills' titles. "Erskine May" states clearly that amendments may be made in Committee even if they are not within the Bill's scope according to the long title. Thereafter, once the Bill is amended, the long title may be changed, but only to take account of the amendments that have been made. Therefore, I believe that we can square the circle and there is no reason to say that, by widening the scope of the Bill's long title, it would open the issue so much that the Bill's progress to Report would be unnecessarily delayed.

Mr. Forth: I have not been in the House as long as the hon. Gentleman and I defer to his experience. In addition, I have not had the opportunity to read "Erskine May" during the debate, as I was listening attentively to contributors. However, what the hon. Gentleman says is a new one on me, if I may put it as basically as that. I have always been led to believe that we must pay due regard to a Bill's title. If what the hon. Gentleman has just said is true, surely it would mean that any Bill could be amended in almost any way in Committee, and one could subsequently play around with its title in order to accommodate the amendments. That does not accord with my experience, however brief, in the House or in Committee.

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Forth: I do not want to get bogged down in that subject as I want to press on and try to answer questions asked.

Mr. Hughes: I hope that I did not give the impression that a Bill could be amended in any way at all as that is not so. It can be amended even in a way not covered under the Bill's title if the amendment is connected with the Bill's purpose. However, I think it is Standing Order No. 62(b) which states that a Committee can amend a Bill and change the long title for that purpose. If the Minister checks "Erskine May", which I can gladly provide for him, I believe that we can reach common ground on this if there is the will to do so.

Mr. Forth: I shall certainly look at that, but this is exactly the sort of issue in which I do not want us to get involved. What we must do—until today there has been a broad measure of agreement on this—is to try to focus attention on the Bill's aims and motivations. We must ensure that it makes proper progress through the House, receives proper scrutiny and is on the statute book before any rude interruptions. I fear that if we are tempted to act as Opposition Members are trying to tempt me to do now, we might jeopardise the Bill's progress. I accept the offer of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) as given in good faith, but there are 646 hon. Members—I exclude you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and your colleagues for this purpose—and we cannot necessarily rely on them all to show such restraint and singlemindedness as the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: May I press the Minister on the assurances given by the Secretary of State? I hope that the Minister is not back-tracking on them because we would take a dim view of that.

I suggest that the Minister talks to his departmental officials at the earliest opportunity to find out whether my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) is right. I give the Minister the assurance that, as we have already said, we have no intention of frustrating the Bill. If any strange event were to take place, the Bill would be given the quickest journey through the House and, I hope, through the other place. There is no question of any hon. Member trying to frustrate the Bill. I urge the Minister to consider seriously whether the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North is possible.

Mr. Forth: I accept the hon. Gentleman's offer on the basis on which it was made. The hon. Gentleman knows that it would be more than my job was worth to attempt to go back on undertakings given by my right hon. and learned Friend. He can be certain that that will not happen. I hope that Opposition Members will accept in good faith the undertakings given by my right hon. and learned Friend and myself and that they will accept that we seek to find the best possible way forward to meet the important points about victimisation. We do not dissent from the arguments of substance which have been made, but we ask Opposition Members to allow us to deal with the matter in the most effective way available to us.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield raised an important point about why there had been no prosecutions following Piper Alpha. As he is an expert on such matters, the hon. Gentleman knows better than I that public prosecutions in Scotland are a matter for the Lord Advocate. He decided in the Piper Alpha case that there was insufficient evidence to establish beyond reasonable doubt whether there was any criminal responsibility for the disaster. Applying the ordinary standard of proof in civil cases to the evidence presented at the public inquiry, there had to be proof on the balance of probabilities. Regrettably and tragically, there was no direct evidence in the Piper Alpha case because little equipment was recovered and many of the key people involved tragically lost their lives in the accident. No new evidence came to light after the disaster, so the burden of proof was dependent on inference. The view was taken that a successful criminal prosecution required evidence to establish beyond reasonable doubt the cause of the disaster and that evidence simply was not available.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): As a Scottish lawyer, may I make the simple point that the Lord Advocate looked carefully at the question of a prosecution for culpable homicide? I agree with his decision that there was not enough evidence for all the reasons that the Minister has given. Our quibble is with the Lord Advocate's decision not to prosecute under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 for which there is ample evidence as shown by Lord Cullen's report.

Mr. Forth: It would be inappropriate for us to dwell on the matter unnecessarily or to attempt to second-guess the decisions of the Lord Advocate in Scotland on the matter. However, I will ask my colleagues to consider again the hon. Gentleman's point to see what substance we can make of it. I have attempted to reply to the point raised by the hon. Member for Sedgefield by putting on record the reasons why some people may find it difficult to understand why no prosecution was pursued.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) made a detailed point about certificates and the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) also touched on that point. The difficulty is that the two contributions made opposite points. My hon. Friend seemed to say that it was too easy to obtain the certificates, and that they were handed out with packets of cereal or like confetti. The hon. Gentleman then implied that it was difficult for people to obtain certificates because of the cost of obtaining the qualifications. I suppose that the true position lies somewhere between the two. The offshore petroleum industry training organisation has now established a data base to provide details of the courses attended. The idea is that it can check more accurately whether people have done the courses, and I hope that that answers the point made by my hon. Friend. She gave me her apologies earlier for being unable to be here for this stage of the debate.

I will look again at the point made by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow. It is worrying if people are being deterred from obtaining such a certificate of qualification by prohibitive costs. The local enterprise companies in Scotland would want to consider the matter, although I doubt whether at this stage we should want to regard it as the responsibility of the LECs to give individual support or subsidy to people seeking such a qualification. I do not rule that out completely, but I believe that we should consider the matter carefully before going down such a route.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful for the Minister's sympathetic response to my point. In a constituency such as mine there are many highly skilled men, such as shipbuilders and welders, out of work. In many cases, because they are unemployed, they are deterred from seeking the vital certificate because of the cost involved in having to travel to Grampian to undertake the training at the Robert Gordon institute of technology. That is the problem.

Mr. Forth: If the hon. Gentleman waits for a few days, he may be made aware of developments emanating from a source not far from me now which may interest him and which may deal with that point. The issue has an application wider even than the application that the hon. Gentleman describes. We are very much seized of that point and we want to take action as soon as possible on it. I am being terribly careful in what I say and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands why.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I hope that the Minister is not speaking about the date that must not be mentioned.

Does the Minister agree that when individuals have raised money to pay for the offshore survival course, it is disgraceful that they should be denied unemployment benefit on the basis that they are unavailable for work while they are on the training course? Is that still the case? Will the Department change that rule?

Mr. Forth: That is not my direct responsibility, but I will ask my colleague the Under-Secretary of State to reply to the hon. Gentleman. I do not want to give an inaccurate answer from the Dispatch Box. I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Salmond: Given that the Minister is in such expansive mood I will press him on the matter of training. The Minister may not be aware that Scottish Enterprise is considering a proposal at present. Although we have some excellent training establishments onshore, there may be a gap in the market, not only for the North sea, but internationally, for training that mimics offshore conditions on semi-submersibles. Would the Department of Employment be willing to co-operate on that?

Mr. Forth: Certainly it would. However, I believe that if Scottish Enterprise has the matter in hand, it could not be better dealt with. I shall introduce a tiny degree of controversy by saying that some of us south of the border are always envious of the resources and resourcefulness of those north of the border in dealing with such matters. I will go even further while I am in an expansive mood and say that we often look at what happens north of the border to give us inspiration and we then follow. In this case, we may want to follow.

I will move on rapidly and I will deal with the points made by—I seem to have dealt with all of this already—[HON. MEMBERS: "The peroration."] No, it is not yet the peroration. I will deal with the important points made by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow about standby vessels. Following the recommendations by Lord Cullen, that is one of the points in which I took a particular interest. I think that Opposition Members have accepted that we have had to strike a careful balance throughout between using the maximum speed in improving the standards of standby vessels and not imposing impractical standards which might reduce the number of vessels available. That could jeopardise the number of installations which could operate and, therefore, the number of jobs that people could do.

There is a balance to be struck between the absolute imperative of safety and the practicability of moving forward on this basis. The Health and Safety Executive looked at the matter and last July—partly, if I may say so, at my urging—issued a new code defining new standards for standby vessels. As I am sure the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow knows, the first trip date was 1 January 1992, by which time matters of equipment on the vessels had to be dealt with. The further vital date of 31 December 1992 is the date by which all vessels must comply fully with the requirements. The United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association—the industry organisation—has undertaken to charter vessels only if they comply with the code.

I believe that substantial progress has been made—and probably the most rapid progress that could reasonably have been expected in this difficult area. There were many years of neglect on which to catch up. I believe that we have done that promptly and thoroughly and—this is important—have carried the industry with us. That was the right way in which to proceed as I hope the hon. Member for Port Glasgow agrees. It is certainly a matter on which we shall keep a close eye because we do not want there to be any suggestion that there is any backsliding. So far no such suggestion has been made, and I hope that the Opposition will accept that we are striking the right balance, making progress where it can be delivered practically in terms of vessels in attendance on installations.

Let me repeat what my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said about the review, which is a matter highly relevant to hon. Members' comments about the role of trade unions and trade union members in health and safety representation. My right hon. and learned Friend referred to the commitment, given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy in September 1989, to review the Offshore Installations (Safety Representatives and Safety Committees) Regulations 1989. We have honoured that commitment, and the review is now under way. It commenced only recently and will take about nine months to complete. The Health and Safety Executive will then want to consult a wide range of interested parties and will then make its recommendations to the commission—the tripartite body on which trade unions are represented. At that point, a balanced judgment can be made on the best way forward. I hope that the Opposition agree that that is a reasonable way to proceed. I believe that it is. The review will be impartial, thorough and professional and will then be dealt with by the commission, which is independent of the Government and in a good position to decide the best way forward.

I hope that I have dealt with the point raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow about our shared desire to see the provision on the statute book. I can give an absolute commitment that it is the aim of my right hon. and learned Friend and myself that the measure will reach the statute book as soon as it has been given due scrutiny in Committee and with the co-operation of all hon. Members involved. I am pleased that the Bill has had such widespread support in the House.

Knowing the hon. Member for Linlithgow as I do, I think that he will understand that I should like to reply to his question about recommendation 57 in writing. It is an important point, and I want to deal with it properly and in detail.

Mr. Dalyell *indicated assent.*

Mr. Forth: I am pleased to see that the hon. Gentleman has accepted that.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister now confirm that the Bill is utterly compatible with the draft directive?

Mr. Forth: The answer is yes. I am sorry that I had missed that point, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me of it.

The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) asked me about a newspaper report concerning the alleged privatisation of the electrical equipment certification service. I should have thought that, having been in the House and in politics for so long, the hon. Gentleman would know that he must not believe all that he reads in the newspapers—indeed, I am sure that he does not. The service is under review by the HSE and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will want to await the outcome of the review, in which a wide range of options will be looked at and in which recommendations will be made as to how best to proceed. That will be done against the background of the fact that the very existence of the executive is predicated on the assumption that we must maintain the highest possible health and safety standards at all times. Nothing that the HSE would do or recommend would prejudice that.

The hon. Member for Stretford also referred to a rising tide of death and injury in industry. I have heard him say something similar before, and have been disappointed for a number of reasons. There is no statistical or factual evidence to suggest such a rising tide. Moreover, the mapping exercise done recently by the Health and Safety Commission compared our health and safety record with that of France, Italy, Germany and Spain and found that we were as good as any of them and better than most. I am disappointed, therefore, that the hon. Member for Stretford should repeatedly make such allegations both inside and outside the House. That does no good to the HSE or the country, and it is simply not true.

I am grateful to all those hon. Members who have participated in the debate for the positive way in which they have lent their support to the aims and objectives of the Bill and, indeed, to most of its contents. If the House gives the Bill its Second Reading, I hope that we shall continue in this constructive spirit in Committee, seeking to fashion a Bill that will make a major contribution to the health and safety of all those operating offshore. The best thing that we can do for the relatives of the victims of the Piper Alpha tragedy and for those who survived it is to produce a good Bill in a timeous fashion. I hope that the House will share that aim and will give the Bill its Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

OFFSHORE SAFETY BILL *[LORDS]* [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Offshore Safety Bill [*Lords*] it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland)

7.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I beg to move,

That the draft Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 18th December, be approved.

As hon. Members will appreciate, industrial relations in the 1980s have been transformed in a way that would have been inconceivable in the 1970s. The confrontation between manager and worker has been largely eroded. Perhaps the clearest evidence of that is the reduction in working days lost due to industrial disputes. In the United Kingdom in the 1970s, nearly 13 million working days were lost each year because of industrial action, but in 1990 this had fallen to fewer than 2 million. In most workplaces, co-operation and partnership are the order of the day, but that is not all; productivity has been increased and much of our lost competitiveness has been regained.

Great Britain's poor industrial relations record in the 1970s was closely paralleled in Northern Ireland, which makes it just as important that the process of step-by-step reform of industrial relations law be extended to Northern Ireland. Those who would contend that there is no need for the Great Britain reforms to be applied in Northern Ireland should remember that, in the last five years of the 1970s, the average number of days lost in Northern Ireland was more numerous than in Great Britain. On too many of our shop floors the "I'm all right, Jack" attitude seems to have crossed the Irish sea. Now all that is beginning to change.

The Government have, through the industrial relations orders of 1982 and 1987, already replicated in Northern Ireland the first two tranches of the Great Britain reforms and the benefits can clearly be seen in the much improved industrial relations performance. It is worth reiterating that, during the last five years of the 1970s, the days lost in Northern Ireland averaged 565 per year per thousand employees, in contrast with an average of 128 days per year in the last five years of the 1980s. In other words, four times as many working days were lost in the last five years of the 1970s as were lost in the last five years of the 1980s.

The 1991 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development economic report on the United Kingdom described as "impressive" the Government's structural reforms such as deregulation, privatisation and employment legislation, indicating that they were reversing the United Kingdom's relative economic decline. We are following all those routes in Northern Ireland to improve our competitiveness. It is important for employers—local, national and international—that the improvements in employment law established elsewhere in the country are reflected equally in legislation in Northern Ireland.

It is also important for workers in Northern Ireland that, like their counterparts across the water, they are entitled to expect their unions to be democratic institutions responsive to their wishes. Equally, responsible unions will wish to ensure that the policies that they are pursuing reflect the views and interests of their members. The public, too, will have greater confidence when they see that union procedures are operated in an open and democratic manner.

Thus the secret balloting provisions, which are at the heart of the proposed order, will ensure that members of unions have a real say in the two key areas of who shall lead them and whether they take industrial action. The order regulates the way in which unions run their affairs and gives remedies for union members who consider that their democratic rights have been infringed.

The Government believe that it is right that there should be a certification officer in Northern Ireland. The post of certification officer in Great Britain was established in 1975 under a Labour Administration. The order also mirrors Great Britain by establishing a post of commissioner for the rights of trade union members.

The order also removes the statutory support for closed shops, which constitute an unacceptable barrier to employment, limit job opportunities and drive up labour costs. I think that perhaps now even the most left-wing of Opposition Members realise the damage done to the image of trade unions among ordinary people by the denial of freedom which any closed shop must bring. I am delighted that, as with many other parts of the order, the Labour party is now converted to our view, even though it strenuously opposed and voted against the equivalent reforms when they were proposed in Great Britain. Perhaps the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) can now tell the House whether the Pauline conversion of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) applies to him. Perhaps he could take this opportunity —I am sure that he will—to clarify what Labour would intend to do, if it were to occupy the Government Benches, in respect of many of the proposals in the order of which the hon. Member for Sedgefield now appears to approve.

All the provisions in the order have been operating effectively in the rest of the country and I am encouraged in moving the order by the fact that it contains nothing that has not already been proved to be important and worth while in practice. That applies to secret ballots for union leadership, for strikes, and even for political funds. If trade unions in Great Britain can follow proper democratic procedures, I am sure that there will be no difficulties in practice in Northern Ireland.

In the wider aspects of democracy in Northern Ireland, the trade union movement has given a most courageous and responsible lead in keeping sectarian tensions off the shop floor and encouraging and supporting full equality of employment opportunities. I mention fair emloyment becuse the order makes some minor and technical amendments to the fair emloyment legislation which gives me an opportunity to underline the Government's commitment to tackling the problems of religious discrimination in employment and to pay tribute to the unions and hon. Members who support that legislation. Just last week the Irish Congress of Trade Unions organised a large rally outside Belfast city hall to express abhorrence at the sectarian killings and to stress the right to life. I count it as a privilege that I attended the rally and I was heartened by the messages of support from Great Britain and Irish trade union leaders.

However, there is a balance to be struck between trade unions in their social and political role and the power of trade unions in the workplace. Perhaps I may give the House two examples. First, we have managed to attract a large proportion of southern trade through Northern Ireland ports. One of the reasons for that is our good industrial relations record in contrast to some of that in southern ports. I believe that this legislation will help to continue that difference by keeping out disruptive elements.

Secondly, we must think about inward investors, particularly those from the United States and Japan, who have had in the past an image of the United Kingdom as a strike-ridden and disorganised area. That has now changed and, if Northern Ireland is to compete with the rest of the country in attempts to attract outside investment, we need the same framework of trade union law.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): As the order impinges on the fair employment legislation in respect of article 106, what has happened about the form that was circulated widely by firms demanding the name of someone's father, the name of the father's employer, the names of that person's brothers and sisters and the names of their employers? If that form has now been withdrawn, is it not unfair that the people who would not fill in that form did not have an interview and therefore jeopardised their right to be employed by particular firms, especially in the centre of Belfast?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman has raised that point with me previously and he was right to do so. As far as I am aware, the form has been withdrawn, but I will confirm that. As for the rights of those who may have been affected because they refused to complete the form, that is clearly a matter which they could take before the commission. If the hon. Gentleman knows of any examples, I am sure that he will be in touch with me about them.

I have put the draft order out for wide consultation and I decided, particularly in the light of the sensitivity of the legislation and the important role of the trade unions in Northern Ireland, to give as much time as possible. I started that process in September 1990. Since then, I have had no response or requests for meetings from any of the Northern Ireland political parties. As to the representations that I did receive, all employer organisations pressed for parity and the trade unions opposed all the changes in the order.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before the Minister moves on from the role of the trade unions, will he clarify one point? Recollecting the highly questionable role in the mid-1980s in relation to the miners' strike, what are we to make of reports today that MI5 plans to take over Scotland Yard's IRA role? What are we to make of the arguments between on one side senior officials at the Home Office such as Mr. Ian Burns, and the Metropolitan police, and on the other side——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I do not see that this has a great deal to do with the matter before the House.

Mr. Dalyell: If the press reports are to be believed, it has a great deal to do with the role of the trade unions in Northern Ireland and their democratic rights. Therefore, I think that it was a legitimate question.

Mr. Needham: I always admire the hon. Gentleman's use of parliamentary procedure to make his point. However, it is stretching it a bit far to say that the reports to which he refers will have any effect on trade union members in Northern Ireland and I have to tell him that the reports have absolutely nothing to do with the order.

The main concern that the unions put to me was the question of retaining trade union statutory recognition. I thought long and hard about that and went back to employers' organisations for their views. However, for the reasons that I have just given, and the need to retain and attract inward investment, I was not prepared to accede to their requests.

We have had representations from potential and existing investors that they would either not come or withdraw because of the differences between mainland law and our own. I see no reason in principle why trade unions should not have to fight for the loyalty of their workers in the workplace by the quality of the services that they offer rather than through statutory protection. In the past, I believe that that has led to the leadership becoming remote from the views of their workers. I do not believe that statutory recognition has done anything to improve the lot of trade union members in Northern Ireland since 1982 when we last reviewed the situation. As hon. Members will know, up to this year there has been an increasing tide of inward investment and many interesting projects are in the pipeline.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Minister referred specifically to Japan earlier. Does he agree with the comments made by his predecessor in the Department, Mr. Adam Butler, who was responsible for economic development, and who said:

> "The Province offers industry an industrial relations record equal to that of West Germany and Japan, and the most productive and efficient workforce in Europe, with the highest academic standards."

How can the Minister reconcile the then Minister's view with the view that, in effect, this legislation is required to make us competitive with Germany and Japan?

Mr. Needham: Because we have moved on since then. In 1982, there was no Japanese investment in Northern Ireland and there was no Korean investment in Northern Ireland. There was no investment from a range of companies that have since come in. As I have said, it is very important to ensure that what we do in Northern Ireland gives us the same opportunity to garner inward investment, such as exists in Wales, Scotland or anywhere else in the country. I do not believe that that would be the case if we had let the recognition procedures remain. For the reasons that I have given, it is up to the trade unions to fight their corner, to get members and to ensure that when they have them they do not just rely on the law to keep them, but maintain the quality of service which will keep their members happy.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Granted that a trade union meets all the criteria that the Minister has laid down, how would he guarantee to the trade union that the employer would recognise the right of that trade union to represent its members?

Mr. Needham: There cannot be any guarantee, any more than there is in the rest of the country. The hon. Gentleman knows that in Northern Ireland employee-employer relations are good and that a strong trade union organisation is very unlikely to be rejected by an employer on the good ground that, if he were to do so, it would be difficult to show that he had the full confidence of his work force. I see no need for there to be such a statutory recognition, which does not exist anywhere else in the country.

Mr. McNamara: In that case, why is it necessary to advance that as an argument for encouraging inward

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investment? If relations are that strong, why should potential employers not be told that we have a strong, skilled, well represented and well-motivated work force represented by trade unions and that therefore they should recognise them and negotiate with them?

Mr. Needham: For the reason that it may be the wish of an employer to do exactly that. However, I do not see any reason why there should be statutory procedures for that. As I have said—the hon. Gentleman knows this as well as I do—the main importance in Northern Ireland is to try to attract investment into Northern Ireland and to grow the companies that we have there. To do that, it is crucial that employment law in Northern Ireland mirrors that in the rest of the country. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that we are going to get American, German, Korean and Japanese investment into Northern Ireland by allowing companies from those countries to come in on the back of statutory trade union recognition rights—I give him an example which he may think is amusing, but it is not amusing when we have 14 per cent unemployment and we are struggling to get investment into Northern Ireland—I can tell him that that would act as a disincentive.

As I have said, I thought long and hard about that matter, not least, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has mentioned, because of what my predecessor said. I came to my decision, and I am sure that, in the light of the image that we have at the moment and our need to get investment, it is the right decision.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Is the Minister saying that there is nothing wrong with the trade unions who operate in Northern Ireland? He has praised many of their activities and the cross-community connections that they engage in. However, the problem is overseas investment into Northern Ireland and the perception of people elsewhere. Are we altering the law to try to influence people overseas in terms of investment, instead of trying to explain to them what the situation is in Northern Ireland? Therefore, there is no need for such an order.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman spends much time on Northern Ireland affairs, and for that the people of Northern Ireland are grateful, but he has not yet been involved in trying to persuade those from overseas to change their perceptions about Northern Ireland. There are a great number of perceptions about Northern Ireland. My job and that of the business community is to try to ensure that there is as level a playing field in terms of attracting investment to Northern Ireland as possible. Trade union legislation, for the reasons that I have given, matters. For those reasons, it is important to ensure that there is parity between the two sides of Northern Ireland and the rest of the country.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the Minister really saying that the difficulty in getting inward investment in Northern Ireland is the present trade union legislation? We have heard the appalling figure today—in nine months the Industrial Development Board secured 44 jobs. Is the Minister saying that that is why the IDB is not making progress? While there may be people from Northern Ireland who are quite happy with this legislation, I do not think that anybody would suggest that that is the great difficulty in obtaining inward investment in Northern Ireland. I am glad that the boss of the IDB has gone. Perhaps there will be some more jobs. One job a week is not a good tally.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman must not let pigeons out of his loft, shoot them and then say to me that I had been part of the release. I have never said that trade union recognition was the main reason why we were failing to get inward investment. Least of all was it the reason why the IDB figures were so low last year. I said that there have been those who wanted to bring investment to Northern Ireland, but who did not do so, said that they would not do so, and even thought of going elsewhere with their future investment, because trade union law in Northern Ireland was different from that in the rest of the country.

Whereas I accept and have praised the social and often political role of trade unions in Northern Ireland, that cannot always be said about the role of trade unions in the economic sphere. I quoted—I think that the hon. Gentleman was present—what the figures were at the end of the 1970s, when they were worse than in the rest of the country. I shall not bother to quote the firms from which those figures came; the hon. Gentleman knows them as well as I do. I do not believe that it makes any sense even to consider giving trade unions in Northern Ireland the power which, in some circumstances in the wrong hands, could take us back to those problems in some areas of Northern Ireland industry.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Needham: I have given way five times. The hon. Gentleman can make his speech. There is plenty of time. I am sure that he will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Flannery: On this point?

Mr. Needham: I should like to get on. If there is time later, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Flannery: I am sorry that the Minister will not allow——

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman can make his own speech in his own time.

Secondly, the unions made a strong argument for changing the rules on political subscription from contracting in to contracting out. I have to say that I find that a quite astonishing suggestion from the paymasters of the Labour party. Why on earth should working people in Northern Ireland have to contract out of paying a levy to a political party which wishes to hand them over to another jurisdiction where not only is there a lower standard of living but whose social policy would be bitterly opposed by the vast majority of British trade union members? Perhaps when the Labour party agrees to allow the people of Northern Ireland to join it, and when it is prepared to accept without qualification the wishes of the majority of Ulster people to stay in the United Kingdom, there might be a case for considering a change. Until then, it is cheeky hypocrisy, and the hon. Gentleman knows it. It is a policy of "I'll take your money, Barney, but you will not be invited to the feast."

As to the other points that were raised by the unions, I accept that, so far in Northern Ireland, we have maintained a good working relationship between Government, employers and unions, and I wish that to continue. I have, for example, recently established new consultative machinery, involving, among others, the unions, to assist the Government with the task of economic regeneration in Northern Ireland.

To return to the point made by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) about the IDB, until this year it has had an increasing rate of success in attracting inward investment to Northern Ireland. Certainly in the past year its success has been disappointing, and not only for the IDB. In the middle of a major recession, it has also been extremely difficult for any Government inward investment agency anywhere in Europe to attract inward investment. However, a considerable number of projects are in the pipeline. It would be entirely wrong to try to massage the figures, rather than to try to ensure that the IDB makes certain that the inward investment that we get comes to stay, is profitable and brings the right long-term employment for Northern Ireland.

I am a former member of the National Graphical Association. I have had my fingers badly burnt, so I doubt whether it is wise to leave industrial relations matters entirely to good will. As some 80 per cent. of Northern Ireland union members belong to Great Britain unions, I strongly support parity on industrial relations law, as I do on many other economic issues on which the trade unions also have no difficulty in supporting me.

Whatever distinguished economists may wish to write from the safety of their Victorian towers, the fact is that Northern Ireland has done better than most other regions of the United Kingdom in working its way through the recession. I congratulate employers and workers on that achievement. One has only to see what has happened to Shorts in the east, or to Desmonds or Maydown in the west to realise what can be done to increase productivity and competitiveness. Because of our image, we have to create the best possible environment to attract long-term inward investment, as well as ensuring that our indigenous industry grows, and grows fast.

The order, by democratising trade unions and giving greater freedom to employers to get on with the job of making and selling their products in a more productive business atmosphere, will help to continue the improvement that I am convinced has already begun, and I commend it to the House.

8.5 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): The Minister declared his interest as a former member of the National Graphical Association. I declare mine as a current member of the Transport and General Workers Union—or the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union, as it is known in Ireland—of which I have been a member since July 1963. I am proud and privileged to be the secretary of its parliamentary group.

The Minister's speech—the figures that he gave and the arguments which he seemed to be advancing—appeared to be parodying the well-known expression that Northern Ireland is "a problem without a solution." By contrast, the order is a solution without a problem.

The Minister's speech was noticeable for its concentration on the details of proposals contained in the order. He clearly failed to provide any evidence showing that the order is necessary, desirable or even beneficial to Northern Ireland. He cannot claim to make such advances as he did on the basis that he has made them while existing law has been in operation. It is not surprising that the Government are finding it hard to make a rational case, because the explanatory document which accompanied the original draft was distinguished by its complete failure to give any sign of the real reasons why any such legislation should be necessary for Northern Ireland, other than the fact that there is similar legislation in Great Britain.

On several occasions, the Minister was asked to fill that gap and he failed to do so. The Minister has not justified the order and he cannot do so. He cannot claim that there is a problem to which this so-called solution corresponds. There is no evidence of any industrial relations difficulties which are hindering economic growth and employment prospects in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the official organised trade union movement falls over backwards in its attempts to encourage prospective employers to come to Northern Ireland. They are members of every ministerial team and delegation which goes to America and elsewhere in search of employment.

There is no evidence to suggest that trade unions have been guilty of any abuse of their position in Northern Ireland. Such evidence as exists shows that the trade union movement in Northern Ireland has always behaved with the utmost sense of responsibility. Indeed, last month's demonstrations—which the Minister mentioned—against the Teebane massacre gave the lie to the suggestion that trade unions in Northern Ireland, politically, economically or socially, are anything other than responsible in their attitudes, because they know that their members' lives, incomes and hopes for employment depend on their responsibility.

Further, the Minister knows as well as all hon. Members of the enormous debt owed to officers and officials of the trade union movement in terms of industrial relations and a wider social harmony. Their ability to act has been based on their recognition by workers who have elected them to their positions of responsibility—their recognition of their responsibility not only economically on the factory floor but also socially. Their ability to act in one area has depended upon their ability to act in the other.

The trade unions have led the way in anti-intimidation and anti-discrimination campaigns in Northern Ireland, but they have been able to do so and have had great success in keeping it outside the work force because one could not distinguish their industrial role in any way. That role was economic and was concerned with defending the working conditions and incomes of their members.

The order is as irrelevant to the real economic and social problems facing employers and employees in Northern Ireland as the recent proposals put forward by the Secretary of State for Employment are to those of us living in Great Britain. I have no doubt that the order will be seen as yet one more cynical attempt by the Government to divert attention from their disastrous legacy of high unemployment, bad investment and bad growth.

The Minister regards his order as a modernisation of the industrial relations framework. I cannot accept that, since one of the most basic elements of a modern industrial society is fairness. That is a quality which is distinctly lacking in the legislation before the House tonight.

This legislation is intended to strengthen the hands of employers at the expense of organisations representing employees and nothing could have been made clearer from the Minister's statements. We do not believe that a

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

framework which seeks to damage the interests of employees can be in the ultimate interests of industry as a whole, or of society.

As well as being deficient in terms of fairness between employees and employers, there is a grave doubt about the extent to which the realities of life in Northern Ireland have been taken into account. For example, while postal ballots for union elections and ballots on industrial action are perfectly sensible, the legislation does not adequately take into account the security implications of the requirement to maintain a list of members. Members of unions in security sensitive posts, union members who are also part-time members of the security forces and those who are employed by firms carrying out work on behalf of the Crown would find themselves placed in an invidious and dangerous position. It is especially ironic when one considers that the Government advise many employees to ensure that their names do not appear on lists of any sort which are open to external scrutiny, but then in trade union legislation they demand that employees' names should be on lists openly available.

After much pressure, the Minister began to recognise that there was a difficulty here. Although he has made some improvement on the previous draft, it is not clear that the full implications have been taken on board and that they will be effective to any extent. Therefore, we can legitimately claim that the legislation will put at risk the position of union members in the categories I have already outlined.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Surely that point was raised in regard to the fair employment legislation, to which the hon. Gentleman's attitude was entirely different. I would be more concerned if lists of religious affiliations were available, as they are through the fair employment legislation. I accept his point that the proposed lists are dangerous in the present situation and that people may be put at risk. Perhaps those on this side of the water do not realise how much people fear that they are to be put at risk. However, the fair employment legislation poses an even greater risk because religious affiliation is made known and available. From recent publications, it is clear that employers with just a small number of employees have listed their religious affiliations.

Mr. McNamara: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, but I do not accept his point. I do not believe that people are specifically targeted because of their religious affiliations. I do not accept that those people should be called, of all things, legitimate targets because of their position as members of the security forces or because of the work that they carry out on behalf of the security forces.

The decision to limit the power of unions to exercise disciplinary powers over their members is somewhat worrying. Again the Minister has failed to show that such powers have been abused in the past. What he appears to have neglected is the extraordinary heroism that many full-time and lay officials have demonstrated in the workplace. I do not believe that anything that affects their ability to provide positive and constructive leadership is in the best interests of Northern Ireland. The ability to cock a snook in the workplace at authority or lay officials or elected shop stewards could undermine much of the work which the Minister has praised and which has been carried out by trade unions.

The Minister should reflect on the role of the Northern Ireland Committee Irish Congress of Trade Unions. It is one of the few organisations in Northern Ireland to cross the sectarian divide. It preserves unity among employees who come from very different traditions. Can the Minister assure the House that he is confident that nothing in the legislation will hinder the officers of the NICTU and its affiliate unions in their tasks?

The Minister will also be aware of certain anomalies in the legislation. It is incorrect to claim that the order replicates Great Britain legislation when there are substantial differences in areas that would have enhanced the position of trade unions and their members. For instance, on the provisions governing the political funds, the order reproduces the 1927 legislation. The Minister says that the order means that money will be denied to the pockets of the Labour party. It does nothing of the sort. All the legislation does is to enable unions to have political funds. It does not say that political funds have to be used or that unions have to affiliate to the Labour party. Many of the unions in Northern Ireland that collect money in this particular way keep that money in Northern Ireland. Many unions that have political funds do not affiliate to the Labour party. The union for which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) speaks is not affiliated to the Labour party.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that about 90 per cent. of trade unionists in Northern Ireland belong to British trade unions, the majority of which are affiliated to the British Labour party. Is not it the case that the vast majority of those British trade unionists who contract in to pay the political levy believe that they are helping to advance the cause of the British Labour party? Is not it therefore fraudulent for that tightly knit group of politically motivated men to hold that money back within separate Northern Ireland political funds and apply them to other purposes? Surely the hon. Gentleman, as a representative of the British Labour party, should be trying to put an end to that fraudulent conduct.

Mr. McNamara: If the hon. Gentleman is able, outside the House, to substantiate that claim about particular people in particular organisations, I am sure that they would be pleased to see the evidence on which he has based that accusation and deal with it properly.

A surprising number of figures have been advanced about the number of trade unions affiliated to the British Trades Union Congress. The largest local government and civil service trade union in Northern Ireland is not affiliated to the British TUC. Many other trade unions in Northern Ireland are not affiliated to the British TUC. Some trade unions organise north and south of the border. Some trade unions organise in this island and in Northern Ireland. Some trade unions organise in this island, in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. Some trade unions only organise in this island and some then organise in England and Wales but not in Scotland, and vice versa. There is a whole range of different circumstances. The suggestion that 80 per cent. of all trade unionists are affiliated to British-based trade unions is open to considerable correction.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I intervene to make the point that the Minister would not allow me to make. The trade union movement is recognised internationally by the United Nations through the International Labour Organisation. In this country certain unions, including the National Union of Teachers, are forbidden by the Government to have any negotiating rights because the Government are their masters. The Government have been condemned three times by the ILO for not recognising that trade unions have the right under international law to negotiate. However, the Government, when acting as an employer, will not allow them to have that right. That attitude pervades the Government's approach to trade unions, and they are displaying that same attitude to trade unions in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara: I much regret that my hon. Friend will not be a Member after the election to see that anomaly and abuse rectified.

The second concept on which the Minister is not prepared to give parity with the rest of the United Kingdom relates to employment appeals tribunals. They are not to apply to Northern Ireland. Appeals are to go to the courts, which will be a slow procedure, and it will be difficult for them to reach conclusions.

In sum, the order represents a vindictive, petty-minded 19th century approach to industrial relations. The Labour party believes in partnership in industry rather than in division. We believe in a collective approach in the workplace and in wider society. Without co-operation, Northern Ireland will sink; with it, it will survive and prosper.

The Opposition believe in a fair and efficient framework for industrial relations which harnesses the spirit of partnership and co-operative endeavour in the workplace. We believe in an advanced, high technological society where Britain will be among the leaders rather than the laggards in the European Community.

The real problems of Northern Ireland will be resolved only by a positive partnership between the Government, employers and employees and with a common commitment to training, research and industrial development. We believe that the best interests of employers and employees will be best served if there are effective rights and duties to make the most of one's talents and to open opportunities to the widest possible extent within society.

At the beginning of his speech, the Minister asked what the Labour party's attitude was to a number of matters. It might be helpful if I were to explain what an incoming Labour Government will introduce in Northern Ireland. First, there will be basic employment rights for all employees which will come into force, whatever the hours they work or the company size, on their first day at work. There will be equal legal status for all workers, including part-time, temporary and sub-contracted home workers, most of whom are women. There will be a charter for all employees, offering new rights and protections, including parental leave for people with family responsibilities, a statutory minimum wage, full trade union representation, protection against discrimination and unfair dismissal, and improved health and safety. The European social charter will be implemented and that will give further protection at work. Employers will be responsible in law for promoting equal treatment at work for all their employees, particularly for women and disabled people. There will be a fairer, more stable legal framework for industrial relations.

We need to guarantee basic rights for all in our society and in industry, particularly women, disabled people and the low paid. We need a system of industrial relations where unions play their full role in protecting the interests of employees and protecting economic growth. On the basis of this order, we cannot get that until the Government are removed from office, and the sooner the better. We oppose the order.

8.20 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): The opposition of Ulster Unionists to debates on Orders in Council that cannot be amended is well recorded. I draw attention to the motion in the names of the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and other hon. Members regarding the Select Committee on Northern Ireland. Natural justice should bring about a Select Committee on Northern Ireland, with the approval of the whole House, and matters such as those before us tonight should be properly debated and amended, if desirable, in a Select Committee on Northern Ireland.

In the Green Paper "Industrial Relations in the 90s" reference is made in paragraph 1 in the introduction to the widely held view of Britain's industrial relations problems of the 1960s and 1970s. It says:

> "nothing did more to damage the reputation of the British economy abroad or to undermine confidence at home in the possibility of economic recovery than the belief that these problems were beyond any real or lasting solutions."

Paragraph 1.2 says that Britain's poor industrial relations were generally acknowledged to be a fundamental cause of weaknesses in the British economy. Britain's industrial record of strikes, restrictive practices and overmanning seriously and persistently damaged its ability to compete in the markets of the world. Under the heading "Industrial Relations in the 1980s", in paragraph 1.5, we are told:

> "Now as Britain enters the last decade of the twentieth century, the situation has been transformed. During the 1980s Britain's industrial relations have seen improvements which would have been inconceivable in the two previous decades."

The economy of Northern Ireland is closely linked to that of the rest of the United Kingdom. If the economy in the rest of Great Britain catches a cold, the economy of Northern Ireland gets pneumonia. The economy in Great Britain can recover fairly quickly, but the agony of Northern Ireland is prolonged and it takes a long time to recover lost markets and employment opportunities. Northern Ireland has always suffered from high unemployment. It may have suffered from the poor image internationally of British industrial relations. Therefore, the changes in industrial relations legislation in Great Britain, which have helped to transform the perception of Britain's industrial relations, are welcomed by my party.

It is satisfying to know that the transformation of Britain's industrial relations has helped Britain to secure and maintain the highest share of American and Japanese investment of any member state of the European Community. At last, positive spin-off is reaching Northern Ireland, where American and Japanese companies are providing stable employment and prospects for expansion.

If the changes in the legislation outlined in the order —for example, that agreements entered into between

[Mr. Roy Beggs]

employers and trade unions will become contracts enforceable in law, requiring each party to the agreements reached to seek to avoid industrial unrest—give more confidence to overseas investors to locate in Northern Ireland, the legislation will bring benefits to Northern Ireland's economy and with that hopes for the long-term unemployed.

International companies should be made aware that, even in the absence of the Order in Council, industrial relations in Northern Ireland have been among the best in the United Kingdom. According to the *Employment Gazette*, some 1,903 strikes were recorded in the United Kingdom in 1990. The region with the highest number had 722 or 37·9 per cent. Another had 523 strikes or 27·3 per cent. I shall not mention those regions for fear of further damage to their image, but the world deserves to know, and it must be recognised, that Northern Ireland had the fewest strikes of any region of the United Kingdom with only 18 or 0·9 per cent.

Industrial relations reform in Great Britain has contributed to significant improvement in industrial relations and subsequently a significant overall reduction in the number of strikes and days lost. While the *Employment Gazette* of July 1991 confirms that stoppages in Northern Ireland were the lowest by region in the United Kingdom in 1990, one must assume that the record for the fewest strikes will be held by Northern Ireland when the order becomes law.

The order will give comfort to employers and protect the rights of trade unionists. The absence of abuse of trade union power in Northern Ireland will mean that, although the order may improve industrial relations, it will not result in major changes. The vast majority of trade unionists in Northern Ireland are law abiding and would not support or encourage unlawful behaviour. Traditionally, high unemployment has meant that those fortunate enough to find work do not jeopardise their employment by industrial unrest. The Northern Ireland work force is open to exploitation and the order will provide some protection.

Article 5 says:

> "The Certification Officer shall maintain a list of trade unions and list of employers' associations containing the names of those organisations which are entitled to have their names entered therein under the following provisions of this Article."

The certification officer can remove the name of an organisation from a list if it appears to him

> "not to be a trade union or . . . employers' association . . . but shall not do so without giving the organisation notice of his intention to do so and without considering any representations made to him".

Under paragraphs 3 and 4, an organisation can be entered in the list for a fee of £45. However, under article 6(2) an independent trade union has to pay £305 to be certificated. Is there some prejuice against a trade union being an independent trade union? How can it be justified that one body can register for £45 while £305 is sought from another?

I support the provisions that require the keeping of proper accounting records and the making of annual returns. It is only fair to their members that unions and employer associations keep such records. Memberships will be helped by the provision that the most recent annual returns must be available on request.

Article 32, in part IV, deals with the right to a ballot before industrial action is taken. I support the right of union members to stop their union calling them out on strike without a proper ballot. No organisation should be able to force its members to act against their will or conscience. Proper ballots should be held before a union can call a strike. It must be a call and not an order.

Being a trade union member should not place a man or woman at the behest of that organisation. He or she should enjoy the basic right of choice and should not be subject to discipline by the union for failing to respond to a call to participate in industrial action. Unions should be the instruments of the workers, rather than workers being the instruments of trade unions.

Collective action is an accepted norm in industry. It has always been used and it will continue to be used by workers if their representatives feel that they are being treated unfairly. That does not mean, however, that an individual must be a party to collective action that he feels it would not be appropriate to be party to as a matter of conscience. If the call is justified, workers will respond collectively. The measure of justification for corporate action will be the response of workers to it. Industrial action to enforce trade union membership is unacceptable in a free society. Provisions that prevent such action are, therefore, to be supported.

Article 106 in part XII introduces the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Acts. In Northern Ireland we have an horrendous situation in which a Government who are supposedly committed to freedom in the workplace have enacted legislation that encourages employers to recruit on the principle of merit while being expected to monitor religion to ensure that there is some sort of notional religious balance in the work force. Regardless of whether the workplace is based in a Protestant or Roman Catholic area of Northern Ireland, an employer must endeavour to ensure that there is a balance between Protestant and Roman Catholic employees despite the danger to which that might expose employees who, through the distorted employment map, may find that the only place where they can obtain work is in an area where they would rather not be.

Similarly, a trade union has no right to demand that recruits are union members. The fact that an applicant for a job is or is not a trade union member should be irrelevant to the selection process. Similarly, an employer should not be allowed to discriminate against an applicant on the ground that he is a trade union member. In Northern Ireland we are endeavouring to retain the merit principle in employment as against bureaucratic interference in the employment market. The illegality of industrial action to enforce trade union membership and the prevention of discrimination against trade union members are in accordance with our endeavours.

I support article 20 in part III, which is headed

> "Industrial action authorised or endorsed by trade union without support of a ballot".

The Ulster Unionist party supports measures to ensure that industrial action is called only as a result of such action being favoured by union members through a secret ballot. Shows of hands at factory gates discredit unions and are an infringement of personal liberty given the intimidatory nature of such gatherings. All union members should have the right to vote for or against industrial action. They should have the right also not to take part in any such action, regardless of whether the majority is in favour of taking that action.

I support the provisions for secret ballots that are set out in part IV. The entitlement to vote in such a ballot must be accorded equally to all those members of the trade union who it is reasonable, at the time of the ballot, for the union to believe have a right to take part.

Part XI is headed

"Machinery for Promoting Improvement of Industrial Relations".

It runs from article 82 to 90. Given the lack of research into industrial relations, the work of the Labour Relations Agency in producing its survey of the private sector in 1988, as well as its current work on the public sector, is to be commended. We look forward to its publication in due course.

Articles 91 to 94 refer to industrial courts and courts of inquiry. During a debate on 11 May 1987 on industrial relations in Northern Ireland the Minister's predecessor, the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who took a keen interest in Northern Ireland matters while he had ministerial responsibilities, said:

> "The vast majority of trade unions operating in Northern Ireland—there are 88—are Great Britain-based, but eight have their headquarters in Northern Ireland and five are based in Dublin. The five Dublin-based unions have about 19,000 members, which is about 7 per cent. of the total union membership in Northern Ireland. Enforcement of Northern Ireland court judgments in the Republic will be possible when the Republic gives effect to the European convention on jurisdiction and the enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters. In practice, we do not anticipate a particular problem."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1987; Vol. 116, c. 142.]

I have a copy of the convention. Perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us whether it has yet been ratified by the United Kingdom. It is stated in my copy that it has not been. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell us what progress has been made towards ratification by the Irish Republic.

Mr. Mallon: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman sees no problem in the enforcement of our High Court judgments against unions whose headquarters are based in the Republic of Ireland. Will he explain how a receiver could be asked to operate within such a union and how funds could be sequestrated on the basis of a decision of the Northern Ireland High Court if the headquarters are in the Republic of Ireland?

Mr. Beggs: The hon. Gentleman has asked an interesting question which I think would be answered much more easily by the Minister when he replies.

I pay tribute to Northern Ireland trade unions for their courageous public opposition to terrorism and their support for the rights of workers in Ulster irrespective of their religious background. Those workers should have the right to life and the right to work. The vast majority of trade unionists have fostered good working relationships in industry and commerce throughout the troubles. They have helped to maintain harmony in the workplace in the face of sectarian paramilitary assaults and intimidation. Trade unionists in Northern Ireland have acted responsibly in the past. Trade union officials deserve credit for the part that they have played in securing industrial peace in Northern Ireland. The common sense of Ulster folk, including trade union officials, will prevent industrial strife in future and help to encourage new investment to provide employment opportunities that can be shared by all sections of the community.

8.39 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): One of the problems of this debate is that we are in danger of shooting the messenger rather than rejecting the message. I must express my admiration for the Minister's work overseas, in the face of great difficulties, in trying to attract inward investment to the north of Ireland.

Reference has been made to the Industrial Development Board figures that were released today, although no one knows whether they present the entire picture. Irrespective of the figures, we must pay tribute to the Minister for his efforts. He does a difficult job in the current circumstances and it should not go unremarked —especially as I intend to oppose the order. I do not attack the messenger—and I do not mean that in any disparaging sense—only the message.

There must be something remarkably perverse about a Government who, in a place such as Northern Ireland that has so many problems, tamper with the very things that are working. We had an education system that had served the north of Ireland extremely well, but the Government introduced root and branch reforms with the result that that which was working extremely well is now in a state of confusion. I am glad to say that it is still working very well, but not as a result of the Government's efforts. Lo and behold, the same now applies to trade union activity and industrial relations in the north of Ireland. They have worked extremely well throughout the years, but they are now being tampered with by the Government. In our debate last week, the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) quoted the old American maxim, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Once again with this order, the Government are taking that which is working and doing very well and changing it and creating difficulties.

The order does not meet the pretensions enshrined in its title. It puts into north of Ireland legislation the anti-union, anti-worker programme that the Government have introduced in the remainder of the United Kingdom. It is framed not on the experiences of trade union relations in the north of Ireland, but on the Government's perceptions of the problems of the British economy and of trade union relationships in Great Britain. It could be described as being an ideological hammer to crack one of the few remaining protections for the ordinary working person in the north of Ireland. That is in direct contrast with developments in other EC member states and elsewhere in Europe. The disadvantaged and the weakest sections of the working community, especially part-time workers—who, in the north of Ireland, are almost by definition women—will have their protection substantially weakened by the order. It will not meet the essential need to protect the weakest in society, but it is in line with the Government's refusal to advance workers' rights through the European social chapter.

There is an implication—indeed, I would say even a direct claim—in what the Government are doing that the United Kingdom economy cannot sustain improvements in the rights of the least protected workers. That is an indictment not of the work force, but of the economy that the Government have created and of the Government themselves.

[Mr. Seamus Mallon]

The order does not have its origins in the industrial issues in the north of Ireland. If the Government think that it does, we have a right to know what those issues are. What has caused so much concern that the Government have introduced this order for the north of Ireland? Is it the number of strikes? The hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) showed clearly, in the figures that he quoted, that that cannot be so. Is it abuses by the trade unions in the north of Ireland? We could not accept that theory, either. Is it unrest fostered by trade unionism or industrial relations? There is no justification for or evidence of that. Is it violence engendered by industrial unrest? No. None of those stands up. There is no evidence to suggest that there has been a reason within the north of Ireland to introduce such an order; there is only the fact that the Government want to import Great Britain legislation into the north of Ireland, without reference to the potential damage to industrial relations that it might cause.

Earlier, I quoted the words of a previous Minister in charge of economic development, Mr. Adam Butler. It is worth repeating his remarks. He said:

> "The Province offers industry an industrial relations record equal to those of West Germany and Japan, and the most productive and efficient work force in Europe."

Yet this order is being introduced to deal with that most productive and efficient work force in Europe and with the trade unions in the north of Ireland, which have a record equal to those of west Germany and Japan. I wonder why. Again, empirical evidence has not been presented to show the need for the legislation. It is the Government's ideological craving to impose their will, irrespective of the result.

The IDB also had something interesting to say about trade union relationships in the north of Ireland. In its 1990 document "Forward Strategy", it states:

> "Northern Ireland companies benefit from many natural advantages—industrial tradition, strong educational base, strong work ethic, effective industrial relations."

That is the system that the Government want to change radically. I ask the Minister to cite the reasons why. What are the industrial relations abuses in the north of Ireland suspected in the past and in the present that have potential for the future and that must be dealt with in such a way? It is only right that we should be given reasons why. We have been given no reasons to date, and I do not believe that we ever will—they do not exist. The Minister cannot give us reasons.

As has been pointed out, there is a contradiction in the application of some of the articles in the order. Many unions operating in the north of Ireland have their headquarters in Great Britain, in the north of Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland. That will lead to an unequal impact when unions have their headquarters in the Republic of Ireland but their membership in the north of Ireland. If there were ever to be the sort of industrial problems in the north of Ireland imagined by the Government—and there has been no evidence of any in the past—the order would lead to administrative and legislative confusion. An example would be in the election of senior executive officers. How could the union election provisions under part VII of the order apply to a union based in the Republic of Ireland but with its membership

I do not believe, as the hon. Member for Antrim, East said, that that problem could be dealt with easily. We are all aware of the difficulties in the harmonisation of legislation north and south of the border. We know how long that takes. I wonder why there was not some effort made to reach harmonisation with the Republic of Ireland for this order, so that there would be at least a basis for equality and a common approach. Perhaps that was too difficult or just not possible, but at least we have a right to question whether it was tried.

I am astounded by the way in which the rights of workers within the system in the north of Ireland are treated so shabbily in the order. I refer first to the workers in firms with fewer than 20 employees.

They will have no right to know the disciplinary procedures that will apply to them, even in the event of dismissal. In a situation in which there is religious discrimination and political and sectarian tensions in the workplace, it would strengthen the position of both employers and employees for the latter to know the disciplinary procedures.

Those who have given less than two years' service will have no right to know the reason for their dismissal, which could have serious consequences. Workers whose employment ceases through no fault of their own will find that their social security benefits are affected. An individual having less than two years' service in a company might be disqualified from social security benefits simply because he or she is not able to give the reason for dismissal.

Natural justice also demands that someone who is dismissed from employment should know the reason. Anyone working for a firm having 20 or fewer employees has a right to that information, yet the order will deny that right.

If a dismissed person wants to bring his case before an industrial tribunal he will be required to make a payment of £150. There are provisions to award costs against those who bring frivolous or fallacious claims. If the unemployed are to seek any redress at an industrial tribunal, they will be expected to find a large sum of money out of their own pockets. That is unacceptable, especially in respect of people who are at their most vulnerable. Having been dismissed, they may then discover that they are unable to pursue their rightful case because they lack the necessary cash.

Already, people who bring successful cases before an industrial tribunal cannot be reinstated, and the amount of compensation is ridiculously inadequate. Added disadvantages are being heaped upon them.

The certification officer will in effect be attached to the Labour Relations Agency. That is a bad mistake. There will inevitably be a clash of interests, because the officer's quasi-judicial function will conflict with the agency's neutrality and independence. The officer will be required to adjudicate against the interests of trade unions while being part of the Labour Relations Agency. The officer is given both an adversarial and conciliatory role.

I touched earlier on the difficulties that will arise where unions have their headquarters in the Republic. It is a matter of regret that there is no reciprocity with the Registrar of Friendly Societies in the Republic. There should be mutual recognition, or some common form of registration, so that the problems that will otherwise arise can be avoided.

Similar problems will arise in respect of articles 7, 8, and 9 as they apply to property, trusteeship, and indemnification. The order does not, and cannot, differentiate between property, assets, and funds in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. How can the Northern Ireland High Court appoint a receiver to investigate the affairs of a union whose headquarters are based in the Republic? How could the court sequester the union's assets, or remove its trustees? That provision will present practical and legal problems—that is, if there is any need to implement the order. If there is no need, one questions the purpose of the measure.

The order will make it difficult to take action against members who ignore the democratic decisions of the majority of their colleagues. That right exists in any organisation. I remind the Minister that his own party exercised that right recently in relation to a member who was deemed to be guilty of making racist remarks about others. The same can happen in any political party, because the Whip system is so strong—and rightly—that people have to answer to their colleagues. Yet the order substantially reduces that right in respect of trade unions. We should compare that with our own situation, to see to what extent it is justified.

Where something is working, it is foolhardy to tamper with it, without any guarantee that the working of the organisation will be improved. As I said earlier, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

8.55 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The order is being presented at an incredible time. We are two months or less from a general election. Suddenly, measures that have operated for a long time in Great Britain are being brought forward and pushed to Northern Ireland. We are dealing with a measure on industrial relations. It is not the poll tax that Northern Ireland has never had that it is suddently to get in the last rush.

Given that a general election is on the horizon, it would be possible for the Government to present in Northern Ireland, where Conservative candidates are standing, a measure that sought a mandate for these provisions. If they are so good and can be argued for, and if there is the kind of empirical evidence that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) sought, all this could be done in the context of Northern Ireland, so that its views are properly considered within the political process.

There is a great difference between Northern Ireland and Great Britain in many matters, including industrial relations. Unemployment in Northern Ireland is higher than in any region of Great Britain. In those circumstances, the trade unions find difficulty in negotiating, increasing their membership, securing recognition rights, and undertaking the other tasks that they are required to perform in the interests of their members. It is therefore much less likely in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom—although I do not believe that it happens in a wider context—that union members will exhibit any tendency to act as tearaways, to act irresponsibly, striking first and thinking later.

The Minister has advanced no argument for the order, apart from the perceptions of some people overseas in regard to inward investment; he has produced only bland statements, as opposed to the results of detailed investigation revealing the views of potential investors. I doubt very much whether those perceptions exist. It is possible that many assume that the industrial relations legislation that the Government have introduced to influence their friends overseas already operates in Northern Ireland. Although that does not make it right in a British context, it is unlikely that it is given a second thought—and, if it is not given a second thought, it cannot be used as the linchpin of the argument for the order.

The provisions of the order have been debated at length, at more promising times of day and to a packed House—the principles that affect Great Britain, that is. On this occasion, unfortunately, not many hon. Members are present—even Northern Ireland Members.

As the Minister recognised, the trade union movement in Northern Ireland does a great deal to try to tackle terrorism, and to seek to knit the two communities together. It supports bodies such as Counteract, the anti-intimidation unit sponsored by the Irish Confederation of Trade Unions. The youth section is represented by the "Hands off my mate" campaign.

Such examples illustrate the value of the work of the trade union movement, much of which takes place outside the normal day-to-day negotiation on behalf of union members and has a wider social impact on the situation in Northern Ireland. The order would impose strict controls on what are termed "political objectives", and the expenditure of money on such objectives. Normally, they are tied in with party-political objectives. The order states that, if part of the purpose of funding is to undermine political parties and positions—to persuade people to point in other directions, as it were—that is unacceptable.

How do contributions to Counteract fit in with those provisions? Presumably, the legal interpretation could apply to the political position with which Sinn Fein is associated, or that of the Ulster Defence Association and any body that it might support. A host of problems, many of which have already been mentioned, arise in the order.

Industrial relations reform in Northern Ireland should not be produced as an afterthought to clear the ideological decks before a general election, and to press earlier ill-thought-out measures on the area. It should be given deep and serious consideration: it could well be part of the general election campaign in Northern Ireland. Proper industrial relations reform should be associated with what Northern Ireland needs most to begin to displace those who stand for violence and intimidation.

Massive economic and social regeneration is needed. Any attempt to gain money, here and there, from overseas will do nothing to encourage it, even though that money may be needed. The Government should commit themselves to ensuring that a collective response is adopted towards Northern Ireland so that employment can pick up. Fair employment legislation would then stand a much better chance of succeeding.

The social charter provisions are infinitely more relevant to Northern Ireland than this order, which has been introduced during the final days of a dying Government. That is disgraceful. It runs counter to the Minister's analysis. He had some sound points to make about the trade union movement in Northern Ireland and the work that it does, especially its counter-terrorism work. To pay the trade union movement back in that way is entirely inappropriate.

I was disturbed to hear that the request for a response to the documents that were issued at an earlier stage led to the political parties in Northern Ireland choosing not to respond but to leave it until tonight to make their points. Northern Ireland needs politicians who are very much

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

aware of the position in which working people, in particular unemployed people, find themselves. The problems that face them have been reflected in the speeches made tonight.

Mr. Mallon: Apart from the points that have been made by the members of the Northern Ireland political parties who are here tonight, does the hon. Gentleman accept that Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland spend more time dealing with the problems faced by their constituents than most politicians anywhere else in the world and that, by the very nature of the problems in Northern Ireland, all Northern Ireland politicians, of whatever party, have that record within Northern Ireland? Is it not very damaging to the political process to use at every opportunity Northern Ireland politicians as whipping boys for the mistakes of other people—in this case for the mistake of introducing this legislation that is not needed?

Mr. Barnes: I grant that Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland have more problems to deal with in their constituencies than do the average representatives from England, Scotland and Wales. Some will deal with them in a valiant and full way. There are disparities between Members of Parliament anywhere.

I am not sure why I am being taken to task. The main thrust of my argument was against the Government's position. I then advanced the argument that it was disappointing that no formal response had been put to the Government, based on earlier documentation. Those political parties that are based in Northern Ireland, that are active in Northern Ireland and that have their roots there depend for their position in Parliament upon the votes of masses of trade unionists and people who formerly were in trade unions but who are now unemployed and desperately in need of their assistance. That does not mean that the efforts of Northern Ireland Members of Parliament are not appreciated.

When I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, I was about to compliment him on the points that he made in his speech that seemed to me to deal with the provisions of the order in a way similar to the way in which they were dealt with previously in the House by Labour Members of Parliament.

9.9 pm

Mr. Needham: I have to say to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) that, whatever else may be said of this order, it cannot be said that it has been rushed through. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not present when I explained that it had gone out to consultation in September 1990, having been published, I think, in 1988. I always listen to the hon. Gentleman's contributions to these debates, and I always compliment him on the fact that his heart is in the right place. Where his head sometimes takes him I am not quite sure.

The hon. Gentleman talked about massive social and economic regeneration. That is an elegant expression, but what does the hon. Gentleman actually mean by it? Is he suggesting that his party, if it were to get into power, would increase significantly the amount of money that is made available to Northern Ireland? Surely "massive social and economic regeneration" could not be accomplished by the private sector on its own. I should think that hon. Members on both sides of the House, like all the parties in Northern Ireland, agree about the need for massive social and economic regeneration. That is what we are trying, and have tried for the past 12 or 13 years, to achieve.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East said that the social chapter should be employed in Northern Ireland to create employment. How many additional people does the hon. Gentleman think Harland and Wolff or Machies or Desmonds would take on if the social chapter were introduced in Northern Ireland? The whole point about the social chapter is that, by comparison with the Germans, it would make us less competitive because we shall have to start paying German social costs.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Why do the Germans want it?

Mr. Needham: The Germans want us to have it because they know jolly well that it would make it difficult for us to compete with them.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Answer the question.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman invervenes, from a sedentary position, in an argument in which, up to now, he has not shown much interest. As I indicated to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East, there is no conceivable likelihood of additional jobs arising from the introduction of the social chapter. In fact, the opposite is likely to be the case. Take, for instance, the 48-hour rule. Over the years, that has been adapted by industry in Britain and Northern Ireland to fit certain shift patterns, and in certain industries it gives us an economic advantage. The introduction of this change in a place like Northern Ireland could very well do enormous damage to companies such as Dupont as they compete with their German opposite numbers. Does the hon. Gentleman suggest that that step would help to provide employment in Northern Ireland?

Mr. McNamara: Dupont in Germany already operates the 48-hour rule. It is a question of averages over a period of weeks.

Mr. Needham: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Northern Ireland desperately needs to be competitive. Anything likely to turn it into a high-cost economy would damage employment prospects.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is a level playing field.

Mr. Needham: In no way can it be considered to be a level playing field if the rules in Germany fit German employment patterns but do not fit ours. Because of the difference in productivity and in the history of investment, our industry would be put at a disadvantage.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) quoted what a predecessor of mine had said in 1982 about our productivity. I do not have my predecessor's words at hand, but, on the recognition issue, I have already accepted what the hon. Gentleman has said. It is absolute nonsense to suggest that the productivity of Northern Ireland industry bears comparison with the productivity of Japan or Germany. I wish that it were so. I wish that we in Northern Ireland had such a rate of productivity. Were it so, we would have a much greater industrial base and would pay much higher wages.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh is not as naive as that. He knows as well as I do—even with a gobstopper in his mouth—that the productivity levels in every economic report are not as high as that. That is one of the major reasons why it is crucial that we improve productivity and do not saddle Northern Ireland employers in industry and commerce with costs that they cannot bear if they are to maintain present employment levels.

Part of the strategy that the Government are adopting in Northern Ireland is to try to force those employers towards achieving higher productivity and greater competitiveness. I am glad to say that all the Northern Ireland Members have a large measure of support for that policy. If the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East has had time to read the economic strategy that I have proposed, I do not think that even he would have much difficulty in following it.

Mr. McNamara: The Minister says that he wants greater productivity and higher investment. How will low wages affect those two issues? On the basis of his argument, we shall pay people in Northern Ireland less and less.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman turns every argument on its head. We have to achieve higher investment and productivity over a period of years in Northern Ireland. That will not be achieved by saddling employers in Northern Ireland with a series of straitjackets, with respect to either industrial relations or the social charter.

Mr. McNamara: Rubbish.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman says, "Rubbish", but he proposes a national minimum wage for Northern Ireland. The Department of the Environment and a range of economists who have studied the figures know perfectly well that that policy will create massive unemployment among women workers in Northern Ireland. It is estimated that between 25,000 and 50,000 women in Northern Ireland stand to lose their jobs due to the introduction of a national minimum wage, which is based, not on wage rates in Northern Ireland, but on wage rates throughout the country.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That is not in the social charter.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman, who continues to contribute from a sedentary position, says that that policy is not in the social charter. Indeed it is not, which makes it doubly dreadful. We would have to contend not only with the social chapter mentioned by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East, but with a minimum wage, which would have a devastating impact on Northern Ireland.

Mr. McNamara: Precisely how does the Minister arrive at his figures 25,000 to 50,000 people—mainly women—who will lose their jobs in Northern Ireland? Who will do their jobs if they do not? Does he not know that the social charter will give benefits, not on the two-year qualification basis that he wants, but to all workers at all times and will seek to stop the exploitation of low-paid workers, particularly women, in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: Nobody wants to exploit women working in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman's form of exploitation is to put them out of work. I shall state clearly how that would happen. It is no good the hon. Gentleman smiling at his hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

Northern Ireland women work largely in the garment industry, which has to compete not with German textiles or French textiles, but with imports from all over the world. Over a period of years, the garment industry in Northern Ireland will have to adapt and increase its productivity and investment to try to ensure that it can compete.

If the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) proposes to introduce a national minimum wage based on £3·40 an hour—the 50 per cent. he mentioned—immediately the Labour party comes into office, I shall be perfectly happy to take him to any number of employers in Northern Ireland. In fact, I shall ensure that they write to him in the next few weeks and give him details of the problems that his policy will create for them.

Mr. Mallon: I agree with the Minister about productivity, but to use an analogy, at one time chimney sweeps who did not put little boys up chimneys did not have the same productivity rate as those who did, but that changed. Is not the basic flaw in the Minister's argument that, although productivity can be kept high by paying people peanuts, that is not the point? We must promote high productivity while paying people a just and fair wage.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that there is a limit to the wages that an employer can afford to pay, in terms of the products that he manufactures. The hon. Gentleman says rightly that none of us wants a low-wage economy, and that we want to move to higher productivity and to different sorts of products. The hon. Gentleman knows that that takes time. If he wants to protect those who are on low wages, he should follow the routes that all Governments since the war have followed—either the taxation route or the introduction of measures such as family credit. If the hon. Gentleman considers the profits of companies in his constituency or the profits of companies in Northern Ireland generally, he cannot suggest that the only people who should pay are the employers. The employers are not making the profits to do so. If the employers were asked to pay and could not, they would go out of business, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and their customers would buy elsewhere.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North came out with a panoply of measures which I have never heard from him before. I should be interested to know how much they would cost and I hope that he will keep them to himself. If he starts to publicise the brave new world that he hopes to foist on the economy of Northern Ireland, it will not be a question of the Industrial Development Board announcing 44,000 new jobs a year. It will be a question of it announcing 44,000 losses, because it will be impossible to bring inward investment to Northern Ireland, in contrast to the south.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh asked about the south and made a perfectly fair point. Only 10 per cent. of trade union members in Northern Ireland are members of trade unions from the south. Some 80 per cent. are Great Britain affiliated. We believe that the trade unions with headquarters in the south will abide by the laws in Northern Ireland. The fact that they are southern unions which operate in Northern Ireland does not mean that we

[Mr. Needham]

cannot introduce industrial relations legislation in the north of Ireland. The hon. Gentleman made a point about trying to move closer together on industrial relations law. The legislation in the south which was recently introduced has gone a considerable way towards the proposals that we have introduced in the north.

Mr. McNamara: Is the Minister not aware of the fact that the Government of the Republic, for whom I hold no brief—the Minister, not I, raised the point—have stated that they will implement the social charter? Is the Minister not aware that the Government in the south already give protections, which are so sadly lacking in British legislation, to part-time and women workers?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows full well the position of employment and the conditions of employment in the south. He knows that legislation recently introduced in the south brings it closer to us on industrial relations legislation. If the hon. Gentleman believes for one minute that the Government of the republic will introduce the social charter in ways which would move the republic towards German wage costs and social costs, and which would put even more people in the republic out of work, he lives in an even bigger cloud cuckoo land than I thought he did.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh made a serious point about the security of personnel in relation to the electoral register and to the balloting provisions to take account of union representation. The register of members needs to contain only members' names and an address—not a postal address, but some form of identification address such as a payroll number. We have taken into account the point made by the hon. Member and, with respect, he should perhaps occasionally take into account some of the fears that exist elsewhere in Northern Ireland about the issues raised by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). Moreover, in security-related establishments, the delivery of ballot papers need not be by post.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North suggested that what we proposed was a solution that did not have a problem. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the need for secret ballots before a strike is not a problem or that we should not have elections for union officers? Is he suggesting that closed shops are not a problem? Of course there are problems, and the hon. Gentleman is aware of them. I listened in vain for the hon. Gentleman's proposals on the subject of this order—although I heard an enormous amount about his proposals for increasing unemployment in Northern Ireland.

The order is intended to promote enterprise and industry in Northern Ireland. As the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) said, its purpose is to ensure that employers in Northern Ireland can expand, so that we get inward investment, and to ensure a level playing field with other parts of the United Kingdom.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 90, Noes 87.

Division No. 74] **[8.25 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Brazier, Julian
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Irvine, Michael
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Maclean, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mills, Iain
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Raffan, Keith
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Speed, Keith
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Trimble, David
Walden, George
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wolfson, Mark

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Timothy Boswell.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Anderson, Donald
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin

Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Vaz, Keith
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 18th December, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Industrial Relations (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendment) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 18th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Needham.]*

Local Government (Northern Ireland)

9.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I beg to move,

That the draft Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 14th January, be approved.

This is an important piece of legislation for Northern Ireland. Before going into the detail, may I highlight two aspects of it which I feel will lead to a radical improvement in the way in which district councils think and operate in the Province?

The first aspect is competitive tendering. Without doubt that has had the greatest impact in the past decade on the way in which the public sector does its job. We are entitled to demand that the services funded by taxpayers' and ratepayers' money are delivered in the most efficient and effective way. Competitive tendering, in the Government's judgment, achieves that.

The proof of the pudding is, of course, in the eating, but one has only to look at the savings and improvements in the efficiency and quality of services achieved by local authorities in Great Britain across a whole range of services. Liverpool, for example, contracted out its refuse and street cleaning at an estimated saving of £4 million a year. Kensington and Chelsea recorded a saving of £1·6 million. In Northern Ireland, the success of competitive tendering has extended to the health service, where savings of £7·4 million have been achieved; the education boards saved £1·2 million, and indeed the civil service itself saved £5·3 million.

Nor do I accept that competitive tendering reduces a council's powers. What it does is keep the councillor more in touch with the ratepayer rather than defending the actions of the council. That is not compulsory privatisation or compulsory contracting out. Councils retain responsibility for the service, and the order will allow council's direct service organisations to tender for the work. But councils will be required to specify and monitor the standard of service that they require, whether or not the service is provided "in-house" or by contractors. There will be no lessening of standards. In fact, standards should improve, since the inevitable consequence of introducing competition will be to widen the choice of contractors to councils, and that will lead to higher production, better services and lower prices.

There is one further issue on which I should assure the House, as far as competitive tendering is concerned. The Government are conscious of the potential for paramilitary exploitation. Every step will be taken to eliminate that risk, whatever form it takes. In article 21 of the order, additional powers have been taken, over and above those introduced in Great Britain, to allow the Department to specify certain information which a contractor must provide if he wishes to tender. That will be a filtration process and should thwart attempts to win contracts by the paramilitaries posing as bona fide contractors. We are not prepared to see better use of the ratepayers' money put on one side solely because of the threat of fraud, from wherever it comes. If that were to be the case, the whole of Northern Ireland could end up employed in the public sector. There will of course be difficulties in preventing exploitation by the paramilitary organisations and others. However, the Government are determined that they will

[Mr. Richard Needham]

not be allowed to muscle in, and because it is difficult to deal with the problem by way of primary legislation, the order also includes an article which gives a general power of direction over councils. This is an additional safeguard and will be used to take immediate steps to combat any paramilitary threat should it arise.

An equally important provision in the order is the proposal to allow the product of a 2p rate on the promotion of economic development. Nothing can be more frustrating for the many able councillors in Northern Ireland than for them to find that, under the present restrictions within the powers of local government, they can do so little to improve their areas.

There has been an immense change since I first became Minister with responsibility for local government some six and a half years ago in the number of councils and councillors now working cross-community in the interests of all. Dungannon, Londonderry, Foyle, Ballymoney, Lisburn, Banbridge, Fermanagh, Newry, Armagh, Downpatrick, Omagh, Strabane, to name but some, have set up imaginative and professional ways of promoting their areas. Even Belfast and Cookstown seem, at last, set to follow. The Tyrone economic development initiative and the Brownlow trust are examples of councils, jointly or individually, fully playing their part.

I want to see that grow and expand and I am only too happy to give councils an incentive to use all their talents in bringing pride and employment back to their districts. In the historic towns of Carrickfergus, Armagh and Downpatrick we have arranged a partnership between the Department of the Environment and the district council, where the Department of the Environment provides a town planner to provide the physical development and the conservation elements, and the council provides the administrative back up. Initiatives are channelled through a board, which is made up of elected representatives and officials of both councils and the Department of the Environment. That has proved to be a great success, attracting both commitment and development on the ground.

The order is also important because it sets out standards of behaviour and conduct for councillors. An updated code of local government conduct will be introduced after full consultation with district councils.

It is also important for councils to have clear and effective working arrangements. Those arrangements should be covered by standing orders, but unfortunately not all councils have them. Over time some standing orders have fallen out of use and are no longer effective. Article 33 of the order will allow the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland to introduce a revised set of standing orders, which allow for a statutory core for councils to follow. That provides a better framework so that business can be carried out fairly and reasonably, and in a way which reflects the interests of all members of the council. That provision will not be introduced until there has been full consultation.

No changes in the administration of the building control and environmental health services will take place until value-for-money studies are completed. If any changes are proposed councils will be fully consulted about the new arrangements.

There has been a considerable debate in the past about the way in which vacancies in district councils have been advertised. So the order strengthens the role of the local government staff commission and ensures that job vacancies are more widely canvassed. There is, of course, no intention to curtail the career opportunities of existing staff.

Finally, the local government auditor is given extra powers to prevent district councils from incurring unlawful expenditure and allows them to stop councils spending money on political publicity.

In conclusion, I believe that the order will not only ensure that local government spends its money more carefully and efficiently, but that it will lead to better services for the public. I also believe that the order will improve the working relationships within councils and the standing of councils by making their commercial and political behaviour more open to public view. I commend the order to the House.

9.45 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): The Minister and I seem to have drawn the short straw of being here, yet again, late——

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Late?

Mr. Stott: Well, latish on a Monday night, for the third week running.

I recognise that most of the hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland have been or still are serving members of city councils or district councils. I will restrict my remarks in order to allow them to bring to bear their personal experiences in this short debate, which affects the services provided by local government to the people of Northern Ireland.

The order is rather like the curate's egg. It is good in parts—and where it is good, it is welcome. Where it is bad, it is bad. It is my considered view that the Government have missed an opportunity to conduct a fundamental review of the nature and purpose of local government in Northern Ireland—something which I am doing on behalf of the Labour party. The Government are attempting to ride two horses at once. They are attempting to deprive local authorities of their extremely limited powers to provide services, while also attempting to promote a greater sense of responsibility in local councillors.

Part II of the order deals with competitive tendering, but I did not hear the Minister once use the phrase "compulsory competitive tendering". Let us not make any bones or have any dubiety about it: this is another example of the importation of failed English dogma into Northern Ireland. As I said to the hon. Members who represent the Province when we debated the Northern Ireland electricity order, why should we look into the crystal ball when we can read the book? We only have to consider what has happened on the mainland to see what compulsory competitive tendering has done.

I shall cite one or two examples. In my local authority, a group of its employees won the tender from the authority to administer and mow all public places, including public parks. As the Minister will know, I am an aging cricketer and during the summer I play cricket in a public park in Wigan. Unfortunately, those who won the tender to cut the grass and mow the strip did not take away the grass cuttings from the playing surface, which prevented every stroke I made from going for four.

The other example does not relate particularly to local government. The window cleaning service in the House of Commons has been privatised, but one of the employees was not vetted by the company that won the contract and he was charged by the police for stealing from Members' offices, and subsequently released. That is the kind of thing that tends to happen when public services are privatised.

There is something offensive about a group of well-paid individuals, such as Members of Parliament, sitting here to decide on lowering the living standards of some of the worst paid sections of the community. That is what CCT means—low pay and local authority workers being even more exploited than they already are.

Furthermore, CCT means not only a diminution in living standards for the local authority worker but a reduction in services for everyone. In the context of the eventual viability and effectiveness of local democracy in Northern Ireland, limiting the powers of local authorities to decide how they should provide services is singularly short sighted. Removing from local authorities the responsibility to provide services in the manner that they feel most appropriate is particularly inappropriate in Northern Ireland.

I recall that John Banham, the former controller of the Audit Commission and now director-general of the CBI, said in 1985:

> "Privatisation is the last resort of a management that has given up."

We support that view, for the Government have made competitive tendering compulsory because of their obsession with privatisation, no matter what harm it does to services, consumers and employees. The consumer has suffered under the Government's "cheapest is best" tendering rules. Contractors and councillors alike agree that, by cutting job security, wages and conditions of service, the Government are undermining long-term means of achieving quality of service. The Minister may appear before us in suit and tie, but underneath he still wears the uniform of a district commissioner.

As I normally do in these debates, I have found something good to say about the Under-Secretary. I commend him on the one concession to reality that he has made since he issued the consultative document. We welcome the decision to include fair employment considerations in the factors that can be taken into account when agreeing contracts. It would be helpful if the Minister could state whether local authorities will have a statutory duty to take fair employment into consideration when deciding those contracts.

I also commend the Minister for articles 26, 27 and 28. We hope that local authorities will take up the opportunity of promoting economic development in their own areas allowed for in article 28, no matter how limited that provision is.

We approach part V with mixed feelings. While we recognise the importance of establishing minimum democratic standards in local government, we are disappointed that the Government have not done more to promote the best practices seen in councils such as Dungannon and Derry, among the others that the Minister mentioned. I would be interested if the Minister fleshed out some of that thinking. I am referring to power sharing and minority rights.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Is that done over here?

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The Labour party should practise what the hon. Gentleman preaches.

Mr. Stott: I hear sedentary voices. If hon. Members wish to intervene, I shall give way.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: What hon. Members mean is that, in Great Britain, only hung councils work together and share power. It is another example of Great Britain asking Northern Ireland to do something that we do not do here.

Mr. Stott: The hon. Gentleman does me a disservice. He thinks that I am not acquainted with local government in Northern Ireland or in this country. In the rest of the United Kingdom, power is devolved to local authorities and the leadership of those authorities is determined not on sectarian but on political lines. What I am saying is what the Minister has already said. Some district councils in Northern Ireland work together for the betterment of their people, unlike certain city councils—which I shall not mention by name, although I am sure that hon. Members know them—which resort to a talking and shouting shop. No power can be given to them unless they get their act together.

Article 38 causes us concern——

Mr. Peter Robinson: Is the hon. Gentleman referring to the sort of shouting in which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) was engaging a short while ago, so much so that he lost the track of what he was saying in his attack on the Minister? Will he admonish his hon. Friend if he is against shouting in debating chambers?

I put it to the hon. Gentleman that the ballot box that operates on this side of the Irish sea operates also in Northern Ireland. The same considerations pertain in Northern Ireland. People vote for those parties whose views are most closely associated with their own. The same democratic institutions that provide people to serve in local government in Northern Ireland provide for the rest of the United Kingdom. If it is right in the rest of the United Kingdom for those who can form a majority in a council to go ahead and run that council, it should be right for that to happen in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Stott: The hon. Gentleman has his point of view and I have mine. All we have to do is see what happens in local government in Northern Ireland. It would be my earnest intent and my hope that the House would devolve as much power as it could to local government in Northern Ireland. It is not possible to do that at present for the very reasons of which the hon. Gentleman is well aware. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) advanced his argument forcefully. Indeed, it seems that he was so forceful on fair employment that he drove the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and some other hon. Members to join the Tories in their Lobby to vote against fair employment in Northern Ireland. I hope that the hon. Member for Belfast, East remembers that.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us what his attitude would be if his brother were murdered and in the council of which he was a

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

member the Sinn Fein-IRA representatives praised the murderers and refused to stand as a mark of respect or to take part in any act of condolence? Would he shout in those circumstances?

Mr. Stott: I would hope that in those circumstances, which would be extremely trying and provocative, I would retain the dignity of an elected representative. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about Sinn Fein. My party has always said that it will not negotiate with Sinn Fein as long as it maintains contact with the IRA. The hon. Gentleman knows that.

As I have said, article 38 causes us some concern. There must be some supervision of local authorities to make sure that they do not exceed their rightful powers, but that is not to say that auditors should have the right to step in and pre-empt a decision as the prohibition order in article 38 would permit. It is a Napoleonic practice of the prefectural veto, which has no place in modern democracy.

We welcome article 41 and the prohibition of political publicity. Too much time and effort has been wasted on this issue in recent years and we look forward to the day when every local authority in Northern Ireland will be seen as a representative of the community which it exists to serve. If the article were applied to the Prime Minister and the Treasury in terms of the citizens charter, perhaps it would not have been introduced. On the whole, the order is good. It is good in parts and bad in others. If a Division is called, my hon. Friends and I may vote against it.

9.59 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I thank the Minister for the consultation that took place before the presentation of the order and for his responses to our many submissions, which clarified certain matters.

As others have said, the order is to be both welcomed and rejected. It is probably fair to say that it is one of the most far-reaching and fundamental changes in local government since 1973.

My party welcomes the proposals that deal with the new code of conduct and practice for councils and those that enable councils to engage in job promotion activities in their own localities. We are disappointed with the ideological transfer of the compulsory competitive tendering provisions from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. Earlier this evening, the Minister referred to parity. There is no parity in the CCT provisions because local government in Northern Ireland does not have power over housing, education, health, social security, libraries, planning, water, roads, sewerage and so on. The CCT provisions will focus on a relatively small range of council functions, but that point has been missed entirely.

As a consequence, it is not inconceivable that the calibre of those wanting to represent their communities in a council chamber will be considerably diminished in quality if not in number. It is the duty of a local council, which is close to its community—especially in the context of the restrictive powers in Northern Ireland—to provide the services scheduled under the order for CCT. We accept that when the order is passed tonight, that will happen.

In each of the last three Northern Ireland debates, the Minister used the term "level playing field". If a different level playing field is to be applied to CCT, we should be comparing like with like. The guiding principle should be real competitive tendering. My party suggested to the Minister—although he did not take it on board, which is not unusual—that certain requirements should precede CCT. First, there should be a fair rate structure for employees and the maintenance of wages comparable with those already being paid to local authority employees. Secondly, there should be the proper provision of social security, sickness benefits and pensions to bind the outside employers to the employees. Thirdly, there should be appropriate and decent security of tenure of job—something that is not evident in the Southern health board, to which the Minister referred.

Fourthly, there should be full compliance with health and safety regulations. Fifthly, there should be real and full compliance with the requirements of the fair employment legislation. Sixthly—something that cannot be legislated for, but which will be omitted in the new regime—is the need for the maintenance and possible expansion of employment opportunities for local people resident in the district council areas. Our experience is that many district councils are major job providers. Work could be taken outside their areas, which would dramatically affect local economies.

Seventhly, and by no means least, there should be a guaranteed service by the potential outside contractor for a minimum of four years. That is the lifetime of a council. It would ensure that an outside contractor with a low bid in the initial stages, which wiped out other bidders and the ability of the council to employ its in-house work force, could not hold councils to ransom in the ensuing years. Those are the minimum requirements for the "level playing field" that the Minister said would be appropriate.

As to article 4(2), it is unwarranted for the Department to take upon itself unlimited powers in defining the work that should be subject to compulsory competitive tendering by way of an affirmative resolution. That unbridled power is totally unjustified in any reasonable democratic society.

Article 4(3) says that before an order by affirmative resolution is made,

> "the Department shall consult such councils, such associations or bodies representative of councils and such other associations or public bodies, as appear to the Department to be desirable".

In some circumstances, it would be desirable to consult a group within a council in order to hear balanced arguments for and against the extension of CCT.

As to articles 5, 8 and 13, I thank the Minister for responding to our strong representations for broader publication of details of the work for which tenders are invited.

In his opening remarks, the Minister said building control and environmental health services required further investigative consideration. I ask him to speed that process, because there is dissatisfaction and unrest among the employees of both the environmental health and building control groups, in the light of current uncertainty.

The extension of council interests into home safety is useful and appropriate for a local community. Councils will also be permitted at long last to become involved in industrial promotion, albeit that many district councils have already done so. However, I enter one caveat. I hope that the new power, which I know will be widely and sensibly used to great effect, will not be viewed as a substitute for the drive and initiative required from a central Government organisation such as the Industrial

Development Board or Local Enterprise Development Unit, and that there will be at least a partnership between them. Earlier tonight, we heard of the difficulties confronting the IDB. It would be easy in certain circumstances for that board to stand aside.

We welcome also the code of local government conduct and model standing orders, for which we pressed Ministers and the Department for many years. My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) spoke of the need to control conduct in council chambers. I spent 32 years in local government, in the old dispensation before 1973, and in the new regime after that, and am aware of the need for adequate standing orders that safeguard the rights of all elected members. If they have followed the democratic process, and are duly elected to represent a section of the community, then whether or not I agree with them, they have a right to represent in the council chamber those who elected them.

There is ample evidence that a code of conduct and model standing orders should be implemented in the flagship of Northern Ireland local government—that is, the chamber of Belfast corporation—as soon as possible.

I am, however, disappointed that the order does not take an obvious further step and make provision, within standing orders, for the definition of a quorum of the council or for the composition of sub-committees of the council so that a cross-section of councils could be represented in the chamber—or, indeed, for a quorum of the sub-committees. The Minister may say that it is impossible to legislate for such matters; let me remind him that councils are elected according to proportional representation. Electoral law suggests that the composition of a council should reflect that of the community. Why should not the code of conduct and standing orders within a council chamber insist, on a legal basis, that the political composition of the council is reflected—again, on the basis of proportional representation?

Let me draw the Minister's attention to article 5/54 of the Widdicombe report, which states that

> "local authorities should be statutorily required to include provision in their standing orders governing the composition of committees and sub committees with delegated powers to take decisions on behalf of the council. These provisions should provide:
>
> 1. for the composition of such committees and sub committees to reflect as far as practicable, the composition of the council as a whole except, in so far as individual parties or councillors might waive their rights".

We are disappointed that the Minister has not chosen to legislate in that regard.

I find it totally unacceptable that, after nearly three years—or four years, if we include the lead-up period—the local government staff commission on fair employment principles, which is supposed to be the watchdog for local government appointments in Northern Ireland, has not yet been able to formulate a code of practice for itself, although the law requiring it to do so was passed in 1989. We were promised that such a report would be published in September 1991, and would be available; we are now promised that it will be available in April 1992. The Minister must agree that that is an unconscionable time for such an important matter to be left hanging.

Finally, I wish to raise the question of political publicity. Other hon. Members have welcomed this aspect of the order, but it contains one glaring defect. I shall not go into the details and quote article by article; let me simply say that the prohibition affecting publishing and publicising has been withdrawn from the original draft, and we find that very puzzling.

I assume that my interpretation is correct. If not, I hope that the Minister will correct me. I understand that it will still be permissible for a council to place a banner outside its offices reading "Ulster says no", with or without planning permission, if the council itself did not pay for it. What I find especially puzzling and suspect is the fact that that appeared to be in the original draft, but is not in the order with which we are dealing.

Do we understand that the use of ratepayers' funds is prohibited—quite correctly—for the furtherance of party-political objectives, but that the council can erect banners, for instance, without any recourse to law?

I can refer the Minister to many instances throughout the country in which planning laws have been contravened. I am talking not only about the contravention of planning regulations in connection with certain party-political objectives, but about the erection of emblems, signs and flags representing proscribed organisations which have never been removed by either councils or the Department of the Environment.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to posters put up against the Anglo-Irish Agreement which was rejected overwhelmingly by the electorate in Northern Ireland, when we all resigned our seats and fought. Is it not a fact that the Minister took very firm action against these posters and that he prosecuted as hard as he could? In other words, he put the boot into every council that did this. Then, because it was found that they could put up these posters inside council properties—there was no need for any planning permission—the Minister was outwitted by the sharp Ulster wit of those people who wanted to keep their democracy and their democratic rights. Does the hon. Gentleman not think that it would be appropriate for the Minister to erect over Hillsborough, on behalf of the Secretary of State, a great notice saying, "Mr. Brooke says no because he is going to make no changes in security" according to today's *News Letter* in Belfast?

Mr. McGrady: I do not know whether or not to welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but it is not for me to cast aspersions on the suitability of the Minister, or his ingenuity—ingenuity which originally came from my part of Northern Ireland, South Down. I should be indulging in self-criticism if I engaged in such an exercise. I agree, however, that there was a certain reticence in applying the planning laws to the taking down of political posters from the city hall and elsewhere. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) acquiesces to the breaking of the planning laws, but that is a problem for him, not for me.

I thank the Minister for the dialogue that we have had with him over the last couple of years and for his sympathetic hearing, if not total acceptance of what we suggested to him. The order contains pluses and minuses, but I think that in totality local democracy in Northern Ireland will take a severe knock when the order comes into effect. Compulsory competitive tendering will sound the death knell of local government as we know it today. It cannot survive if all the services to which the order refers

[Mr. McGrady]

are given to outside contractors. The council chamber will then become a hollow shell. All services will be provided on an agency basis.

As for the need for financial efficiency and value for money, the hon. Member for Wigan referred to the low-wage syndrome that compulsory competitive tendering will create. One has to ask what will then happen. Low wages will have to be topped up by means of family credit and social security benefits. In the end, no savings will be made. People will have to work hard for a low wage. They will lose the dignity of being able to provide for their families through the sweat of their brows. To get people to work for a low wage so that then they have to tramp to social security means that they have to put out the begging bowl for that which is necessary to sustain a minimum standard of living. At the same time they are driven into —something which I thought was anathema to a Tory Government—the dependency culture, which is totally unnecessary and unwarranted.

Local government in Northern Ireland does not want to ride on the backs of its own ratepayers and of its own community—people on low wages. We know that we can get good services, efficiency and value for money within council chambers by judicial administration. We do not need compulsory competitive tendering to be imposed upon us. It is an ideological transfer of Tory dogma from one regime in Great Britain to Northern Ireland. The cap simply will not fit.

10.19 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I agree with a great deal of what the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) has said about compulsory competitive tendering. However, I think that the hon. Gentleman missed the mark somewhat when he suggested that CCT would remove any meaningful local government. The truth is that Northern Ireland has not had meaningful local government since its council system was destroyed in the early 1970s.

However, it is worth putting on record the fact that local authorities in Northern Ireland have relatively few powers. They have the right to decide on what day the bins should be emptied; to decide the opening hours of cemeteries; to say what community facilities should be provided in their areas and to pay for them; and to determine what recreational facilities should be made available. But, unlike councils in the rest of the United Kingdom, they do not have authority in respect of housing, health, education, planning and many other such matters. So far as those functions are concerned, Northern Ireland councils have simply a consultative role. Thus the Minister has missed a great opportunity for a much more wide-ranging review of the entire local government scene. He could have put forward proposals to make local government much more meaningful.

Mr. McGrady: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the major functions of local government were transferred to central Departments in 1972 and 1973 mainly because of the way in which those powers had been misused? Let the hon. Gentleman refer to the report of the Widgery tribunal, which investigated the causes of the civil unrest in Northern Ireland. If he does so, he will find that seven of the 11 causes were directly attributable to the activities of local authorities at that time.

Mr. Robinson: I am aware of a number of Roman Catholic councils that discriminated against their Protestant ratepayers, but I do not think that that is why these changes were introduced. They were recommended in the Macrory report, which recognised that there should be a central assembly or parliament to take over many of the powers that had been exercised by the councils. Unfortunately, with the removal of regional government, Northern Ireland was left with what has been called the Macrory gap. Westminster's authority is exercised by the Secretary of State and his Ministers, who do not receive any votes in Northern Ireland. Indeed, when their party puts forward its candidates in the forthcoming election those people are unlikely to get many votes. Even if the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) were to join the East Belfast Conservatives they would hardly be able to storm the ballot. I do not expect that the Conservative party will ever receive any meaningful ballot-box support in Northern Ireland.

By and large, the gap that has been left—this is the area in which the Secretary of State and his Ministers operate —could be better filled. Many of the powers exercised by Ministers or by quangos could be given to local authorities in the Province. I wish that in this order the Minister had addressed that matter.

The compulsory nature of the competitive tendering that the Minister proposes has been referred to. It is precisely the compulsory nature of the tendering to which I object. Like the Minister, I believe that competitive tendering could be to the advantage of ratepayers throughout Northern Ireland, but I believe that it could be advantageous without being compulsory. My district council in Castlereagh already puts many functions out to competitive tender. Indeed, that will be expanded in the coming year. In short, the Minister did not need to nudge us in this direction. I hope that the Minister realises that I do not take issue with him about the advantage that can be derived from competitive tendering.

Mr. Needham: If all councils had been like that of the hon. Gentleman, there would be no need to make it compulsory.

Mr. Robinson: If they had been like my council, they could have had the low rates that my council ratepayers enjoy.

The compulsory nature of the policy will be of concern to residents and will make it difficult for proper competitive tendering.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the hon. Gentleman offer guidance to the House and the Department as to how Castlereagh managed to ensure that those firms using competitive tendering did not employ people claiming to be unemployed and receiving social security? The Minister could perhaps share that information with his colleagues at the Department of Health and Social Services, who employ people who are paid by the state and are also involved in the competitive tendering process.

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman has raised an issue that requires me to be candid. There have been negative as well as positive elements to our experience. On the negative side, as a matter of principle our council has always asked the Department of Health and Social Service to ensure that those working on our facilities are properly registered with the Department and not—as it is referred to in Northern Ireland and elsewhere—doing the double. There have been many instances where people who have been working on council property have disappeared after investigations, precisely because they were on the double and their employer was willing to take advantage of that.

I shall relate another negative experience and ask the Minister if he can give some guidance on what to do in such circumstances. What happens when a council goes out to tender, takes the contract that costs the least and finds, once the contract has begun, that the tenderer is not living up to his or her claims, but it is not legally possible to terminate the contract or to require the tenderer to meet what the council considers to be the conditions of the contract? Does the council have to put up with the poorer service provided for the duration of the contract?

Before someone is actually doing the work, it is difficult to determine how good a job he or she will do. One can find oneself tied fast to a contract on which there is no flexibility or manoeuvrability by the tenderer as to what he or she is prepared to do. Usually, to improve the service to the necessary standard, the contractor has to take on a supplementary tender and copper-fasten the original tender, which will cost more. The contractor then faces a dilemma. He has paid more than the original tenderer suggested. He would perhaps have been better off accepting a tender from a company submitting a bid higher than the original tender, as that would have cost less than the total sum charged by the original tenderer plus the supplementary tender.

I do not know whether I have explained that complex position properly, but we have experienced such problems. It is not good enough to say that one has to be careful when choosing a tender, as we face circumstances in the next two or three decades that might be impossible to contemplate.

I think that the Minister missed opportunities and ducked his responsibilities on the issues of building control and environmental health. My council in Castlereagh is a member of a group and has as its partners councils in Lisburn, in Ards and in North Down, and Down district council for which the hon. Member for South Down has such affection. In terms of environmental health, my council acts as the employer council. In terms of building control, Down district council acts as the employer council.

As my council is prudent, the costs of administration for environmental health are probably about half the costs for building control. My council, therefore, has to pay additional administrative costs because of the poor housekeeping of the hon. Gentleman's council. In this financial year, while there is a small increase, probably even less than inflation, for environmental health administration, there is a 28 per cent. increase in terms of building control. The Minister will not be surprised to know that it is hard for my councillors in Castlereagh to swallow the fact that they have to look carefully at their budgets in every department and that they have been careful, to the extent that they have been successful in reducing the rates, when the people in Down spend our money as if there was no tomorrow.

Mr. Needham: That is exactly why we are undertaking the value-for-money studies. I have no doubt that as soon as they come out the hon. Gentleman's council will come very high on the list.

Mr. Robinson: I can confirm that the council will come high on the list. In every value-for-money study that has been carried out in insurances and in recreation, we have come top of the list. I should have thought that the answer for the Minister in terms of building control would be to allow the councils to be directly responsible without having the group committees. They would then have directly within their own responsibility the building control authorities. I accept that there are advantges in certain circumstances in councils joining together to consider certain areas of expertise in building control and in environmental health, but my suggestion of district councils being responsible for building control does not stop one council employing an expert in one area of building control and allowing that person to be used in other areas for a fee.

Mr. McGrady: Lest the House be misled by the hon. Gentleman's ingenuous remarks, I must point out that the budgets for building control and environmental health are fixed by the committees and not by the councils. The sharing out of the cake to district councils comes from the budgets fixed by the group committee.

Mr. Robinson: That does not take anything away from my argument. It has taken the hon. Gentleman 10 minutes from when I made the remark until now to think of an answer to my proposition. It is the cost of the administration which is relevant. Two Castlereagh councillors, two Lisburn councillors and two Ards councillors on a group that is administered by Down cannot tell Down that it has to change its whole council structure. The hon. Gentleman has an administration in Down and runs it in a way that is more costly than that in other areas. We can leave Down, although I ask the Minister to ensure that councils that are careful and prudent are not punished by the action of those who are imprudent and wasteful.

I also ask the Minister to consider the operation of the order. He may be able to give us guidance about how it will all get off the ground. I recognise that the Minister has outlined the areas in which it would be necessary for compulsory competitive tendering to take place and I understand that the councils will have certain responsibilities in terms of putting an advertisement in the local papers and in the technical journals to invite people to show an interest in putting in a bid.

That requires councils to undertake some detailed and lengthy work in preparing specifications for every aspect of their responsibilities. The lengthy nature of that work leads me to ask the Minister at what point he intends to stipulate that the councils should start compulsory competitive tendering. At this stage, we in local government are preparing our estimates for the next 12 months. Once those estimates are cast, they cannot be changed, because of compulsory competitive tendering: we have set our course for the next 12 months, which takes us into 1993. How will the order fit into local government's estimates, and how will it be implemented in terms of the amount of work that has to be done in preparing specifications?

Mr. Needham: We will introduce draft regulations about the timing later in the year, and we shall want to discuss with the councils when they will come into effect.

Mr. Robinson: I hope that I am not reading too much into the Minister's remarks. I understand him to be saying that the decision will not be an immediate decision affecting the next financial year, and that the councils will have the whole financial year in which to prepare specifications and prepare themselves for CCT.

That leads me to the next problem that councils will face. Councils are required in law, before 15 February each year, to prepare their estimates for the coming year. It will be a guessing game for any district council to determine what its rate is likely to be after the CCT process begins. I do not believe that any of us could evaluate the amount that any tenderer will specify in his proposals. I assume, therefore, that the next estimates will be based on what it would cost the council to do that work, so that if the council's direct labour force is outbid a net profit will accrue to the council in respect of that work over that financial year. If that is not the way in which the matter is to be dealt with, I shall be interested to hear.

Let me deal with some of the additional matters included in the order—first, with section 115 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972, as amended by the order. That section deals with the amount of money that councils can use for matters which, until the order was introduced, would have been to the benefit of all or part of the council area or to all or some of the ratepayers in that area. The wording has now been changed, and the proposed new subsection contains the words:

"unless the direct benefit accruing to its district or any part of its district or to the inhabitants of its district or any part of its district will be commensurate with the payments to be made."

I do not understand how that is to be assessed and judged and by whom, or exactly what the use of the word "commensurate" is intended to convey. What the district council may believe is good value for the half penny that it uses for a particular purpose in its area may not be deemed by the local government auditor or the courts as "commensurate" with the payments made. Perhaps the Minister will say—before some councils get themselves into trouble and face surcharges—exactly what the effect of the provision will be.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) did not intend to convey the impression that those of us listening to his speech formed. He seemed to be talking in very negative terms about those involved in local government in Northern Ireland. I am sure that he would accept that the vast majority of the people in local government in Northern Ireland are very dedicated people who carry out a thankless task in a sensible and diligent way. To suggest that they are elected in some sectarian head count and that they should be treated in a less acceptable fashion than elected representatives on this side of the Irish sea is unfair and a slight on the people involved, in whatever party, in local government in Northern Ireland.

I suspect that that kind of view is encouraged by the code of conduct proposed in the order. I have read the draft code of conduct which has been sent to local authorities in Northern Ireland. There is not much in the code of conduct that hon. Members would object to. However, implicit in its being sent to local authorities is the view that people are not observing the terms contained in the code. I am sure that the Whips would not have allowed such a draft code to be distributed for this place. It seems to be based on the principle that each councillor must take every decision for his or herself and they should not listen to their parties, to which they should be loyal and which allowed them to become elected on a manifesto.

The Minister would be wise to make it clear that councillors in Northern Ireland should not take offence because the code of conduct is being introduced. He must recognise that the vast majority of those involved in local government are upright and decent citizens who do a very difficult task for very little recompense and thanks.

I hope that the Minister will consider the point raised by the hon. Member for South Down who referred—in a different fashion than I shall—to the expenditure that can rightly be made by district councils on publicity, advertising and information. I will not rest my case on the issue of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. A planning department was used politically by the Minister in the Department of the Environment to refuse planning applications for the posters to which reference was made earlier. The clearest evidence for that can be seen from the fact that the department refused, with the Minister's encouragement, planning permission for the "Ulster Says No" banners in areas where permission was granted for more offensive posters and banners, even in areas that were downright dangerous from the point of view of the traffic. It is clear that the planning applications were turned down because of political motivation.

Mr. Trimble: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that as, under the legislation, permission for an advertisement of that nature can be turned down only on amenity or road safety grounds, it was clearly unlawful for political considerations of the kind referred to by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) to enter into the decision? The Minister acted illegally in that matter.

Mr. Robinson: The Minister can make his excuses later, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman. There was no doubt in local government circles that the Department was being used politically. As we are considering a code of conduct for councillors, perhaps there should be a code of conduct for Northern Ireland Office Ministers.

Mr. Needham: If the hon. Gentleman believes that I have behaved illegally, it was up to him and his friends to take the Department to court. However, during the time that I have been in Northern Ireland, I have always permitted hon. Members to stick their posters on to every available tree and on the back of every conceivable road sign, and there they remain. In fact, the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), since the past three elections, still in full colour adorns the byways of Northern Ireland. The posters are never taken down by the hon. Gentleman and his agents. They are all there totally illegally. I am quite convinced that, when it comes to the election, the hon. Gentleman will take on board the arguments of his hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) so that we will not see every lamp post covered in those posters. They are sometimes dangerous. Until now, I have let them stay because I thought that they were part of electoral practice in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robinson: Although it will brighten up his morning as he travels to work, the Minister will not find my face smiling down at him from the lamp posts, because in Belfast—the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin

Smyth) will confirm this—there is a practice of putting our posters on boards which are attached to telegraph poles. These are taken down—they are costly—after an election is out of the way.

Rev. Ian Paisley: If the Minister goes to North Antrim, he will not find that atrocious poster that has been issued in the House tonight. The people who put up posters in Northern Ireland happen to be those in the Workers party, which still has posters up from two European elections past. As in my hon. Friend's constituency, we all receive a letter from the Minister's Department telling us to take down those posters. In North Antrim we carry out the same practice. We put posters on board, then take them down and use the boards at the next election.

Will my hon. Friend go with the Minister to North Antrim, find all those posters and tell me the locality of them? I should be very grateful to go there and put up new posters over them for the next election which I shall contest against one of the Minister's female candidates.

Mr. Robinson: I am sure that my hon. Friend will probably find that an awful lot of his posters go astray during the election. People will take them down so that they can frame them and put them in their houses and have them for ever and a day.

On the section dealing with the prohibition of political publicity, I have some concern about what exactly the Minister is attempting to catch under it. The order, in tight terminology, indicates that

> "In determining whether material falls within the prohibition regard shall be had to the content and style."

It goes on to state:

> "whether the material refers to a political party or to persons identified with a political party or promotes or opposes a point of view on a question of political controversy".

That seems to be the basis upon which the Minister's officials would take any such decision. Very few decisions on services for local government, for example, would not be taken by a political party and not be opposed by another political party. Are we in Northern Ireland not allowed to give information to the ratepayer about facilities which clearly would be identified with the political party that put forward those proposals and which carried them through the council? If that is how tight the legislation may be, it will be a retrograde step. The loser will be the ratepayer, who will not properly find out about the services in his or her area.

I have some concern about the prohibition notices, but, in effect, they could turn out to be useful in local government in Northern Ireland. One of the great problems that many of us have had in local government in the past is knowing whether, at the end of the day, the Department, under section 115 of the existing Act, would approve the council spending money for a certain purpose. When councils write to the Department, or to the local government auditor, they get vague answers, if, indeed, they get an answer at all. Certainly they will not get a quick answer.

Will the Minister say whether, if a council were to notify the local government auditor that it intended, before a certain date, to spend ratepayers' money for a particular purpose, and if by that date the local government auditor had not issued a prohibition order under article 8(2)(a), the council could therefore assume that it had approval to proceed, and, if it did so, that no legal action or surcharge would follow? If the Minister can respond positively in that respect, many councils in Northern Ireland will view that as an advantage in the legislation. Certainly it would help in terms of giving guidance to them so that they do not get surcharged in the future.

10.50 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I shall make my normal protest about Orders in Council, and tonight I make it with feeling because there have been four speakers and we have one and a half hours to consider an order which will fundamentally change local government in Northern Ireland. It is nonsense to allow an hour and a half for such a subject and for such changes. It is absolutely ridiculous. The Minister will have some difficulty in answering some of the questions put to him. I do not think that he will get round to that. In the circumstances, I shall keep my remarks as short as possible.

There are 24 articles in the order which refer to compulsory competitive tendering. No one has any objection to public money, whether it be tax or rate money, being spent properly. My party would support a policy to spend it in the most economical manner. But it should be introduced not for ideological reasons, but on the basis of the logic of the case. The Minister is optimistic about implementing this departure from existing practice by 10 April—three months from this evening. He will have some difficulty in doing so.

Article 19 extends the exclusion by providing that the council must not take into account

> "any political, industrial or sectarian affiliations or interests of contractors or their directors, partners of employees".

That liberal sentiment would doubtless be laudable in the rest of the United Kingdom, but in Northern Ireland it means that a council could be obliged to accept a tender from a front organisation which has been known to be operated by a paramilitary grouping. It will have no option but to take that tender and to consider it. That is the greatest threat to the policy of introducing compulsory competitive tendering. It is more than likely in certain council areas that that could open the door to paramilitary involvement, either directly through bogus firms, or indirectly through intimidation. It is not impossible that we would get a CCT war breaking out between rival paramilitary groups, bent on extending their geographical area of influence, and on increasing their financial return to get weapons and so forth.

We would welcome the establishment of a scheme to allow councils to provide financial help in the event of an emergency or disaster. It would have been better if the word in the order was "shall" rather than "may". Surely council officials and councillors are quite capable of looking after matters without having to go back to the Department every time for permission.

Article 27 on the promotion of home safety is welcome, but it is spoiled by the realisation that no new money will be coming from the Department to implement it properly. There is a strong possibility that, unless finance is made available, that excellent idea will fail.

The Minister and other hon. Members referred to article 29, which introduces a code of practice for local government. Although the Minister will not have time to answer me, I should like to know why he has introduced the code. Many councils in Northern Ireland have

[Mr. Clifford Forsythe]

standing orders and behave properly. It is only fair to them for the Minister to tell us what councils caused him to decide on a code of conduct.

Article 31 refers to the election of chairmen. It has been known for years in Northern Ireland that confusion appears to preside at the annual general meeting of councils, particularly in those areas where political divisions are balanced. Can the Minister explain how the order will change that? We will wait to see what effects it has in the future.

Will article 36 remove any meaningful function from elected representatives when it comes to making appointments to their councils? A letter about that change was sent to every district council clerk, but it was not sent to hon. Members. We were sent the order and the explanatory documentation, but the district clerks received a letter about building control and environmental health services. However, the order makes no reference to either of those functions. The second paragraph of the letter states:

> "First, it may be helpful if I explain that the draft Order does not refer by name to either Building Control or Environmental Health. The Order merely amends and expands that section of the Local Government Act"

It is grossly impolite of the Northern Ireland Office to send out a copy of the order to us, the legislators—an order that will be passed by the House, even by this bad procedure—without making us aware of the thinking behind that article.

Article 47 refers to the chief electoral officer. Could the Minister clear up the confusion that seems to exist in Northern Ireland about the powers of that officer? To whom is that officer responsible? Who will oversee and monitor the way in which he performs his duties? Perhaps the Minister will write to me about that.

I object strongly to the proposal in article 38, which gives the local government auditor power to interfere in the day-to-day running of councils. It is obviously the duty of councillors to make decisions and to bear responsibility for them. How will the auditor be made aware of the decisions to which he would object? Who will play the role of informant? Will one of his deputies monitor the financial affairs of each council? Will council officers become informers for the auditor? If that happens, it will cause a lot of bad feeling in councils between officials and councillors.

I shall conclude because of the lateness of the hour.

10.58 pm

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) said about the Order-in-Council procedure.

The order introduces radical changes in local government in Northern Ireland and introduces the concept of competitive tendering. When those changes were introduced for England, Wales and Scotland they were subject to days and days of debate, which took up pages and pages of the *Official Report*. Hon. Members representing other parts of the United Kingdom were able to discuss the changes in Second Reading debates. They were able to have a Committee stage, to move amendments, to have a Report stage and a debate on Third Reading. Contemptuously, we are left with one and a half hours in which to debate an order of 43 pages. I have protested myself on the Floor of the House about the way in which the people of Northern Ireland and their representatives are being treated. The Government are guilty of callously denying to the Ulster people their fundamental parliamentary right of being able, through their Members of Parliament, to move amendments to this order or any other measure affecting Northern Ireland.

In effect, Northern Ireland Ministers are throwing on the Table of the House a legislative measure, and saying to the parliamentary representatives of the people of Ulster that they can either take it or leave it. I intensely dislike that attitude. It is not something that one would expect in a democracy or in what is regarded as the mother of Parliaments. I cannot see why the Government adamantly refuse, even at this late stage in the life of the Parliament, to give justice and democracy to the people of Northern Ireland. They say to the politicians representing seats in the Province that they should talk with their parliamentary constitutional colleagues to get political progress, but the Government have it in their power to give, at a stroke, real democracy to the people of Northern Ireland, but they flatly refuse to do so. I know from talking to them that the people of Ulster resent the way in which they are being treated. They expect citizens of Northern Ireland to be treated like the citizens of any other part of the United Kingdom.

I regret that the Government refuse to do this. In the coming election, the people of Northern Ireland, and certainly the people of North Down, where there is a Tory candidate, will have the opportunity to vote for democracy and the rights of the people or for the status quo—this form of colonial government. The latter is what they will be voting for if they vote for the Tory candidate who is opposing me in my constituency. That is an admirable choice for the people to have, and it will be available in other constituencies. People in Northern Ireland will use their vote wisely to make a protest and to make it in the best, most fair and democratic manner.

If I had the right and the power to do so, I would amend the order, because local government in Northern Ireland needs to be vested with greater power to deal with, for instance—I shall pick only one item because time is short—environmental blight. An example is the scandalous situation in my constituency, where the owner of Geddis farm, at Crawfordsburn, an area of great scenic beauty and close by Crawfordsburn country park which attracts thousands of visitors every year, uses his land as a dump.

I invite everyone in the House and the media to visit Crawfordsburn to see the eyesore that Geddis's farm presents to everyone who lives in the area and to everyone who travels along the road past the farm. It is a downright disgrace and an insult to all those who are concerned to preserve the beauty of the area. I have urged the Government to vest the property because I think that that is the only way in which such an appalling nuisance can be brought to an end.

I tabled a question to the Minister in which I asked him to vest the property. I cannot remember his exact words but his answer was in the negative. It is with the utmost sincerity and fervour that I make a further appeal to the Minister to vest the property. I do so on behalf of residents and everyone else who is concerned about the environment.

It is clear that the owner of the farm, Mr. Geddis, is trying to blackmail long-suffering residents into agreeing to a housing development. That is what he wants. If he succeeds, he will be prepared to clear the rubbish, the dirt, the filth and all the vehicles that are littered throughout the farm, including a vehicle which has "knackery" written across it. He has said that he will make an application that there be a knackery on the farm. That is designed to annoy the residents even further. It is clear that he wishes to force them into agreeing to a housing development. I have urged residents not to give way to blackmail and threats.

On Saturday or Sunday night, Mr. Geddis dumped a dead animal—I believe a donkey—and it is in full view of the people who pass by the farm. It is no longer a joke. People should not be able to treat other residents with such impunity. It is an appalling situation that must be rectified without further delay.

I ask the media to take an interest. If the media were to focus their cameras on the farm and shine the limelight upon it, Mr. Geddis might be persuaded to clear the rubbish. As things stand, he will not do anything. On behalf of all those whom I represent and of others outside my constituency who visit Crawfordsburn country park, or who pass along the road that is adjacent to it, I make a further plea to the Minister. I ask him to see what he can do to bring the nuisance to an end.

There is no time to debate all the articles in the order. I shall conclude by asking the Government to re-examine local government in Northern Ireland. Let us have a full survey. We need not piecemeal legislation but radical change, but that must take place with the introduction of a Stormont Assembly or power that will have the authority to bring Ministers and civil servants before it to question them and examine policy and what is happening in the name of the people of Northern Ireland. Failing that, or until that happens, I make one further appeal: a Select Committee should be established to deal with Northern Ireland affairs. That is something that we need desperately. That would enable the parliamentary representatives of the people of Northern Ireland to thrash out the various issues that have been raised this evening.

11.9 pm

Mr. Needham: This has been a wide, varied and fascinating debate on local authority provision in Northern Ireland. Virtually no stone in any corner of the Province remained unturned.

The hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) made an elegant electioneering speech about colonial government in the Province, which he slightly undermined when he spoke about Mr. Geddis's farm. That farm is a disgrace and a tip. No one could have tried harder than the hon. Gentleman and I—and everybody living locally—to do something about it. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is because we have democratic procedures and the rule of law that we have to abide by the judgment of the court. If we had a colonial regime, no doubt the matter would have been dealt with much more expeditiously than either the hon. Gentleman or I have managed to achieve. I give him my further guarantee that I will, once again, consider what can be done.

I shall slip as quickly as possible through the many varied questions raised by the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe). He asked how article 21 would deal with the danger of paramilitaries in compulsory competitive tendering. We understand the difficulties and dangers, which is why article 21 gives the Department special powers to deal with that. We shall all have to look closely at how it works in practice.

On article 29, the hon. Gentleman asked about those councils that have standing orders. I agree that many councils in Northern Ireland have excellent standing orders, but the point of the article is to deal with those that have not.

The point of article 36 is that, in our judgment, a business ratepayer should have the same rights as a local elector when it comes to looking at the books. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the building regulations, the environmental health offices and the Department of the Environment letter that he said had been sent out. I am sure that my officials will have listened carefully to his remarks. They have to listen carefully almost every day, in the privacy of my office, to my remarks about the language they use in the letters that they send. I am sure that they will have equally listened to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. As to the matter of the chief electoral officer, and the question of to whom he is responsible, the hon. Gentleman was right to say that I would not know. I shall write to him. Indeed, I asked that very question only two days ago.

On the question of how local government will determine what is spent by a council beyond its remit, that is a matter for the local government auditor by reference to the relevant statute. I am sure that chief executives and clerks, who have a close working relationship with the local government auditor and a good knowledge of the law, will be able to advise councillors if they go beyond their powers.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: We would not wish there to be any confrontation between chief officers and councillors. That would be detrimental to the running of the council.

Mr. Needham: I understand that point, and it is something that we must all bear in mind.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said that local government has little power. I agree. I make no bones about the fact that I should like local authorities to have more powers. The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) cited the reasons why that is not the case. I do not believe that it is possible to expand those powers, other than by agreement with all the main political parties in the Province, probably in the context of a wider political settlement.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East raised the question of a majority. Of course a majority is fine provided that it is in a plural political system in which majorities can change. When majorities are determined by one community or one tribe, after a while the minority becomes fed up because its views are never expressed. It does not matter whether that is in the east or the west of the Province. The elliptical message of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), who is listening to my words with such care, is not necessarily confined to competitive tendering. I accept that competitive tendering needs to be carefully monitored. The Department and the councils will have to work closely together to monitor how it works in practice.

As to not meeting the specification and having to refer back for an additional contract, it does not appear to me

[Mr. Needham]

to say much for the contract terms—but that is an important practical point, and I will consider it and return to it.

As to what amounts to political publicity, the Government will introduce a code of practice which I hope will make the situation clear.

Reference was made to the local government auditor and how much money can be spent. If the auditor has not advised councils that they may spend money under section 115, and does not issue a prohibition order by a given date, on that basis the council may proceed. However, I cannot tell the House what the local government auditor may decide to pre-empt.

As to the proposal to amend section 115 to provide for benefit being commensurate with the payments made, it will be a matter for councils to determine the level of expenditure. It will fall to the local government auditor to decide whether he agrees. If he does not, he will let the council know. That returns to the point I made about the need for officials to work closely together.

The hon. Member for South Down raised a number of points. He welcomed some aspects of the order and berated others. I understand why he does not welcome compulsory competitive tendering, but, having listened to his argument, I cannot for the life of me understand why refuse collection should not be contracted out.

I ask right hon. and hon. Members to consider the current standard of refuse collection in the Province. If that is the best that can be done by those employed by local authorities, there is every argument for giving an opportunity to outside private contractors, provided that there are sufficient safeguards and specifications built into their contracts.

Eighty per cent. of services contracted out in the rest of the United Kingdom have stayed in-house. The hon. Member for South Down said it was a matter of passing money around, because reducing wages meant reducing the opportunities for people to spend and to save money. Money saved by councils, hospitals, education authorities and the civil service means that there is more money left in the public purse to spend on other services. If, as I said in the previous debate, the argument centres on low wages, those low wages have to be picked up through the tax or family credits system, rather than taken out on the ratepayer—who, after all, is the consumer who pays the money for those services to be provided.

The hon. Member for South Down asked about employment for local people in those services. The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) may know better, being a greater expert on the social chapter than I, but I have the feeling that trying to employ local people in particular areas for particular jobs infringes the social chapter, and would not be allowed under European directives.

I should have thought that in a reasonable democratic society, services should be competed for, and I do not accept that that in any way undermines the role of councillors. It allows the councillor to stand back a bit and to ensure that services are provided efficiently, to the highest quality, and in the best interests of the ratepayers whom he has been elected to serve.

The hon. Gentleman referred to environmental health and building regulations. I mentioned the value-for-money studies that are to take place. I agree that we need to get on with them, and that a decision needs to be made.

The hon. Member for South Down expressed the hope that the increased economic powers being given to councils would not replace in any way the efforts of the Industrial Development Board and the Local Economic Development Unit. My answer to that is: they had better not. If either organisation imagines that it has an excuse to do less, that would fly in the face of everything that the Government propose, which is to increase the involvement of the partnership. I trust that it will give councils greater leverage in achieving that.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about proportionality, but I hope that he will, on reflection, understand the practical difficulties to which it can give rise.

Unfortunately, in Northern Ireland, where some representatives believe in holding the ballot box in one hand and the Armalite in the other, it is very difficult to find sensible ways in which the amount of cross-community activity in councils could be increased if proportionality were forced on them. Having examined the arguments carefully, I do not believe that that would help us to build on what is already working well in Northern Ireland: many councils are working together closely and harmoniously. Some slightly impolite comments have been made about Belfast, but I do not believe that it will be long before Belfast follows, and I feel that it should be encouraged in that regard.

Mr. Trimble: The Minister will recall that, a number of years ago, Belfast council—which is in the habit of putting members of parties other than the majority party on committees—commissioned a survey of experience in England and Wales. That survey revealed that Belfast's record in regard to sharing out posts was better than that of England and Wales.

Mr. Needham: I do not think that it is very valuable to criticise one council or another. My concern is for all councils in Northern Ireland to work together as closely as they can. There has already been a dramatic change, and I believe that that process of change will continue.

Banners and publicity have been mentioned. Graffiti is a problem in Northern Ireland; I have examined that problem very closely, as did my predecessor, the hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), and I must say that I could see no practical way out of it.

I am delighted to hear that the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) is going to take down all his posters; that will make it unnecessary for me to send him the bill that I have been running up over the past six and a half years for taking down all the posters on the back of all the road signs around his constituency. He may, of course, be so busy with his books when he is travelling that he has not noticed the very efficient poster campaign which has been undertaken on his behalf, and which has involved a large number of Northern Ireland road signs; during the last election, it even covered some in my area.

Let me deal with some of the other points raised by the hon. Member for South Down. I do not believe that there will be any need for redundancies. Yes, the draft regulations will be circulated among all councils and interested parties for their comments. The hon. Member for Belfast, East asked about timing. I think that it will be towards the end of 1993 before the first tranche can go out.

The hon. Member for South Down talked about the delay by the local government staff commission in drawing up the employment and appointment procedures. I accept his criticism. This is a difficult matter and we must ensure that we get it right and secure agreement; but we shall act as quickly as we can.

I hoped that the hon. Member for Wigan would do rather better than the daft suggestion made by his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), who, in the opening debate, unveiled proposals for an "unemployment chapter" for Northern Ireland. What we heard from the hon. Member for Wigan, however, was the pay-up-to-the-trade-union chapter. In my judgment, competitive tendering means giving the ratepayer better value for money. Is the hon. Gentleman interested in the consumer, who pays, or in the unions, who currently pay the Labour party? I believe that we should try to introduce a system in Northern Ireland that provides the ratepayer with the maximum service at the minimum cost. To be fair to the hon. Gentleman, he often says that the ratepayers have not much money, and we are talking about the most deprived area of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Gentleman asked about fair employment, and inquired whether the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976 placed a statutory duty on district councils to ensure that the rights of minority groups were protected. The Act bites with equal force on both the public sector and the private sector and places a duty on district councils not to enter into contracts with unqualified employers. That is a clear and precise statutory requirement. To overlay it with a further requirement would be confusing. It is very difficult to see how such a provision could be interpreted or applied consistently across the board beyond what we already do.

Although the provisions of the order do not go as far as hon. Members would like—in some instances by giving more powers to local authorities—while going too far in other respects over the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering, I believe that overall they represent the right step for local government in the Province at the moment and that they will be welcomed by the vast majority of district councils and their officials in Northern Ireland. I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 105, Noes 43.

Division No. 75] **[11.25 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bottomley, Peter
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Emery, Sir Peter
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Irvine, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beggs, Roy
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Haynes, Frank
Hood, Jimmy
Illsley, Eric
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Mallon, Seamus
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morley, Elliot
Paisley, Rev Ian
Robertson, George
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David
Vaz, Keith
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. William Ross and
Mr. Clifford Forsythe.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 14th January, be approved.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (Standing Committees on European Community documents),

MILK

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9997/91, relating to additional rules on the common market organisation in milk and milk products in respect of drinking milk; and supports the Government in its intention to secure fair terms of competition for United Kingdom milk processors as well as a wider choice of available products for consumers.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

CONSOLIDATION, &c., BILLS

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Social Security Administration Bill *[Lords]*, the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Bill *[Lords]*, the Social Security (Consequential Provisions) Bill *[Lords]*, the Social Security (Consequential Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Bill [*Lords*], the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Bill *[Lords]* and the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Bill *[Lords]*, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bills have been read a second time.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

MEDICINAL PRODUCTS: PRESCRIPTION BY NURSES ETC. BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Medicinal Products: Prescription by Nurses etc. Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

HEALTH

Ordered,

That Mr. Jerry Hayes be discharged from the Health Committee and Sir Anthony Durant be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Dixon, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

AGRICULTURE

Ordered,

That Mr. Keith Bradley be discharged from the Agriculture Committee and Mr. Gavin Strang be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Dixon, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Weston-super-Mare Relief Road

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

11.37 pm

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): I should like to thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic for coming to the House tonight to apply himself to the important problem of the relief road—that is what I call it—for Weston-super-Mare.

I last raised this and kindred matters in an Adjournment debate headed "Weston-super-Mare and Banwell (Roads)" on 20 November 1986. I shall quote, first from something that I said, to remind the Minister that I shall not be deterred from raising the subject again and again until our road is put right. I said then:

> "I hope that my hon. Friend will bear in mind that he will not have to meet me too often on this subject if he can say something profitable to me tonight."—[*Official Report* 20 November 1986; Vol. 105, c. 792.]

I concede that the Government have contributed to the first parts of the road, and there has been some improvement in the traffic. That has not been helped by the need for digging up, over no less than three months, the other main access into the town centre.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) who was then the Minister for Roads and Traffic—the important Government post now held by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope)—said:

> "My hon. Friend will not need reminding that, with the exception of the M5 motorway, which is the Department's responsibility, all the roads in his constituency are the responsibility of Avon county council. I note his suggestion that we should trunk a further section of road, but at present, and perhaps for the foreseeable future, it is for the county council alone to determine the priority to be accorded to any improvements considered necessary for its roads."

The Minister continued:

> "The Government are often accused of interfering with local authorities and of wishing to interfere more. I think that this is one of the occasions when, in general, it might be right for Government not to interfere, although I can understand any hon. Member asking why we have not come in with bigger boots and perhaps some financial inducement for the county council to change its order of priorities. A factual description of the situation, however, is that it is up to people in the county to fight for the right ordering of priorities. I hope that this debate will have a valuable role . . . in that."

The Minister's penultimate paragraph was:

> "Parliament has given the county council full responsibility for the local road network, and it would not be appropriate for central Government to interfere in its assessment of the relative priorities of the many schemes contained in its structure plan."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1986; Vol. 105, c. 796-98.]

My purpose in quoting is to paint the scene that presented itself to us, perfectly reasonably, after that debate. Again, I must be grateful to the director of highways, transport and engineering at Avon county council, Mr. Bracewell, for setting out fully the situation about stages VC and VI of the Weston-super-Mare relief road. He says:

> "These stages of the scheme together with Stage IVB are those remaining to complete the strategy of construction of a dual carriageway from Junction 21 on the M4 into the Town Centre. Not until these stages are built will it be possible for traffic to divert off the full length of the existing road and provide the essential environmental relief to residents whose homes front onto the A370"—

and to allow the traffic to flow at a decent and respectable speed even at the height of the summer season and to keep the commerce and industry of our town alive.

Mr. Bracewell continues:

> "The County Council decided that it would make a joint bid for Stages IVB, VC and VI in its TSG bid for a commencement in 1992/93. The total value of this bid was £12,406,000 and the 93/93 expenditure was estimated at £2,088,000.
>
> The objective was to complete construction of the whole PDR early in 1995 and hence maintain the target date set previously despite slippage on other earlier stages. The County Council made this bid its first priority in its submission. The second priority was for a scheme known as the Avonmouth Link. This is a small, but essential, section of a larger scheme being promoted by the DTp to provide better access off the motorway at Junction 18 and to relieve Avonmouth of the worst effects of heavy industrial traffic. It is the County Council's view that this scheme should be promoted and fully funded by the D.Tp as part of their scheme. The County Council have tried by various means, (including a deputation) to persuade the Minister for Roads that this is the case. It has been unsuccessful in these endeavours and hence, at a late stage, was obliged to include it as a bid for TSG in the 1992/93 submission. This has been done to match the timescale for construction of the DTp's own scheme. The County Council had pleaded that any settlement on this scheme should, given the special circumstances, not be at detriment to its bid for funds for other projects. The total cost of the Avonmouth Link is £2,381,000."

I have no desire or suggestion about what should happen to the Avonmouth bypass. I am sure—and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) assures me—that the scheme has priority and is an urgent job. I was astonished to read in a glossy brochure produced by the Department of Transport and headed "South West Regional Brief"—I suggest that a few miles of pavement could have been built for the cost of producing the brochure—under "The Trunk Road Programme" the following sentence:

> "and to provide a trunk road link from M5 to Avonmouth Docks, enabling motorway traffic to bypass the community of Avonmouth."

So even the Minister's own Department actually believes that the bypass for Avonmouth is a trunk road. We have all believed that the Avon link road is a trunk road. The entire Avon road programme is being messed up because the Department will not accept that the main roads—the national roads—in the county should be paid for by it. I am sorry to say that I believe that, by forcing the county council to put in for transport supplementary grant, the Department has been guilty of very substantial trickery.

Now to the positive and more important aspect of the southern end of the county: Weston-super-Mare is the largest town in the old county of Somerset, yet it does not seem to be getting the attention from the Department of Transport that it deserves. We have a new railway station, paid for partly by the county council, but the high-speed trains cannot stop there because the platform is not long enough. We have half the new road, but one cannot get to it, because the essential first part, to which I have referred tonight, is not now to be completed for four years.

I have letters from the district council, the mayor and charter trustees and I know from my discussions with business men, hoteliers and those who manage our tourist industry that visitors do not expect to come off the motorway and drive straight into a traffic jam. I do not want to paint a picture of permanent disruption because—one has to be honest—the traffic does flow, but the newly completed road is now extremely busy. My hon. Friend the Minister would be amazed at how quickly the new road becomes congested, to put it mildly, at peak hours.

There are those who would like to come to Weston-super-Mare for the very good reason that it is a splendid place, but if they realise that their factories are about to be sited half an hour away from the motorway—even though they know that it is only a couple of miles—they will not come. They will go to places with better roads.

In the previous debate, I referred to the impact in sheer economic terms of the traffic delays in Banwell, for example. Within months of our building a bypass for that village, there would be a financial reward for the United Kingdom. The whole question of traffic in rapidly developing areas such as mine must be tackled in a much more determined manner.

I hope that my hon. Friend will not tell me that Avon has done well in a league table or that we have got more than our fair share in some way. I contend that the share is not big enough for anybody.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) was Secretary of State for Transport, he announced—much to my pleasure and with my great support—a doubling of expenditure on roads. But where is the money? It is not forthcoming. OK, there is to be some widening of the motorways but, frankly, they should have been built wider in the first instance, and many of us told the Ministry of Transport, as it then was, that that was so. I was born and brought up in the county through which the M5 runs. I remember telling Sir Peter Agnew—all that time ago—that it should have been a three-lane road and, today, it is being made into a three-lane road.

I hope that some of my remarks may be passed to the Treasury because, although my hon. Friend the Minister will be too loyal to say so, I am sure that that is the source of our problems. In the age of the motor car and road transport, it is no longer acceptable for the Government to sit back and tell us that our road is to be given priority, then to deprive our county of that priority and cheat over the money, spending county money on roads for which it is responsible. A review of the trunk roads system, paying special attention to the problems of Weston-super-Mare and our area, is long overdue.

11.43 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) has argued persuasively the case for completing the final stages of the Weston-super-Mare primary distributor road. He has eloquently represented the views of his constituents, and the House can have no doubt about the strength of local feeling on this issue in Weston-super-Mare.

I agree with my hon. Friend that it is essential that the new road should be completed. Until the final part is finished, the full benefit of the investment in the project and the environmental benefits in the residential areas on both sides of the existing A371 will not be realised. The reason for not accepting the final three stages of the road for transport supplementary grant next year has nothing to do with the Government's view of the scheme's priority in relation to other Avon county council proposals.

The problem that we faced in deciding which schemes to include in the settlement was simply one of resources.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

We received bids from highway authorities for more than 170 major schemes, 160 of which were genuine candidates for grant. Together they would have cost nearly £250 million in 1992-93. However, we could afford only 37 major new starts at a cost of £60 million——

Mr. Wiggin: Peanuts.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend may say "Peanuts", but I am sure that he understands that, with only 37 major new starts and 108 highway authorities, it is not possible for the Minister responsible for roads to please them all.

Many good schemes had to be left out and it was impossible to avoid disappointing many highway authorities with schemes that they believed were important. My hon. Friend's case is for even more public investment in the nation's road infrastructure. I share in the belief that there is a strong case for investing in roads. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare and other Conservative Members take comfort from the fact that only the Conservative party is committed to such investment. The other parties, which are not represented in the Chamber this evening, believe that there should be a reduction rather than an increase in the investment in our road infrastructure.

It is a feature of the transport supplementary grant system that if we agree to fund a major scheme with grant, one that will cost over £1 million, we commit ourselves to supporting it not just for the first year, but right through to completion, and that includes supporting any reasonable increases in the cost. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare will agree with the logic of that. Without that reassurance, highway authorities would find it very difficult to embark on the larger schemes that they often initiate, some of which take several years to complete.

On the other side of the coin, by accepting the more costly and longer-term schemes in one year, we effectively pre-empt the funds available for new starts in future. That is why we had £900 million available for local road capital investment in 1992-93, but over half of that was already committed to major schemes started in earlier years. Demands also had to be met for other essential expenditure, for example, on maintenance of roads and bridges and on local road safety schemes.

Considering that the total bids in all categories amounted to almost £1·6 billion, it will be clear that difficult decisions were unavoidable. We needed to assess not only the relative priorities of 108 highway authorities, but to judge the correct overall balance between one category of expenditure and another. In the circumstances, £60 million for new major schemes was the best that we could do. Of course that is only a fraction of what highway authorities were hoping for, and to produce a reasonable list of approved schemes from this amount was no easy task. To avoid overloading future settlements with commitments inherited from previous years, it was regrettably necessary to limit the number of larger new schemes accepted for grant.

Unfortunately, the final phase of the Weston-super-Mare primary distributary road was one of those which we could not fit in. The net total cost of the proposals was estimated at £12·4 million. Some £2 million would have been spent next year. Ironically that is a prime example of those schemes now in progress which, because of their size and duration, are limiting the funds available for new major projects. It should not be forgotten that my Department has already demonstrated its commitment to the overall project. We have funded stage 1 which was finished in June 1991 at a cost of £3·621 million. That completed the link from Hutton Moor road to the town centre.

Stages 5A and 5B were accepted for TSG, and construction on both started in financial year 1990-91. Stage 5A extends Herluin way to the A371 at the southern edge of the town. It was due for completion in December 1991 and was finished early. Stage 5B is the A371 Locking Moor road diversion. The contract for that has just been let and is due for completion in January 1994. The estimated cost of the two schemes together is £9.93 million. That is no mean sum of money. The Department of Transport has therefore already committed a minimum of £13·5 million to that important roads project in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Despite the rather confusing numbering, stages 4A, 3, and 2 were finished in 1982, 1987 and 1989 respectively. Those early stages were funded by Avon county council, with contributions from developers, and without calling on the Department of Transport for financial support.

My hon. Friend has reminded me that Avon county council believes that the Department has in some way forced the Avonmouth relief road upon it. I can understand its feelings of frustration in getting approval to a road that it thinks should be funded as part of a larger scheme in the national trunk roads programme, while support is withheld from its top priority TSG scheme, but I certainly do not accept the charges of cheating. I can only reiterate that the Weston-super-Mare primary distributor road was left out of the settlement not because we questioned its importance but simply because we could not afford it on this occasion. The Avonmouth relief road was included because it is another important scheme which, this year, we could afford. I am sure that my hon. Friend and other people in Avon would not have thanked me for saying that, because we could not afford the first priority scheme, we were not even prepared to consider whether we could afford the second priority scheme. That would have been perverse logic.

The Department's Avonmouth link scheme has been designed with the aim of solving the problems of congestion on the A4 at Avonmouth roundabout and queues of traffic on the M5 spur. Our proposals have recently been put to public inquiry and the inspector's report is awaited. It will need to be considered by Ministers before a decision on whether the scheme should go ahead is taken jointly by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the the Environment.

Because of my involvement in that process, it would be improper for me to comment in detail on the Avonmouth scheme now, but I need to explain that, when the original proposals were subject to public consultation in 1989, there was widespread local opposition to the inclusion of a proposed flyover which would have carried traffic between the M5 and the A4 over the Avonmouth roundabout. In response to that, the flyover was omitted from the preferred route announced in November 1990. But, as a consequence, there as no longer any justification for constructing, as part of the Department's scheme, that part of the route which would have taken purely local traffic, as opposed to trunk road traffic, out of Avonmouth village. In other words, that section now known as the Avonmouth relief road no longer served any trunk road purpose. Instead, it became only a bypass for Avonmouth village.

In the circumstances, it would not be appropriate for the Department to build the relief road as a trunk road or as a related side road. As I said to representatives who came to see me from the county council at the end of last year, it is not just my opinion off the top of my head or the opinion of my officials; it is confirmed legal opinion that it would not have been proper for the Department to fund the Avonmouth scheme any longer as a trunk road.

As a result, it was left to Avon county council to decide whether it should include the road in its programme and apply for TSG to fund it. I advised on that matter when representatives came to see me. Although the council had already included a bid for grant for the scheme in its transport policy and programme statement, it maintained its view that the Department should build it.

I suggest that the Avonmouth relief road is something of a red herring in a debate on the Weston-super-Mare primary distributary road. The Avonmouth relief road is an important new road whose benefits are indisputable; and, to put it plainly, omitting it from the recent local roads capital settlement would not have left room for acceptance of the Weston-super-Mare primary distributor road.

I acknowledge the feeling in Weston-super-Mare that there is a pressing need to complete the primary distributary road as soon as possible. I assure my hon. Friend that local officials in my Department are continuing discussions with their opposite numbers in the county council and are looking at other ways of giving the scheme the fairest possible wind when we next look at the roads capital settlement. One thing is absolutely certain: for the road to be afforded, we must have a Government who are committed to major investment in our roads infrastructure. I am sure that, after my right hon. and hon. Friends have been successfully re-elected, we will again have a Government with a fresh mandate to continue our major expansion of roads investment.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

1. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise councils were operational in *(a)* March 1990 and *(b)* January 1992.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): There were no training and enterprise councils operational in March 1990. The full network of 82 training and enterprise councils has been operational since last October. That has been achieved as the direct result of the enthusiasm and support of key business and community leaders throughout the country.

Mr. Bowden: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Will he join me in congratulating the TECs on the part that they are playing in promoting the local economy? Having in mind my own South Thames TEC in south London, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the acceptance, success and street credibility of the TECs have been greatly enhanced by the emphasis that they put on the enterprise element of their make-up?

Mr. Howard: I am delighted to respond to my hon. Friend's invitation and I entirely agree with his remarks. The success of the TEC movement is the result of an unprecedented partnership between business leaders and the Government across the country—*[Interruption.]* I note that sedentary observation of the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), which no doubt represents the Labour party's true attitude to training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Ray Powell: What financial controls and supervision do the Government exercise over TECs? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman make a statement on that matter?

Mr. Howard: Money is made available to training and enterprise councils in return for their performance in pursuance of a contract that they make with me. The way in which and the extent to which they perform and adhere to the terms of the contract are carefully monitored. Indeed, complaints are frequently made that too many monitoring requirements are made of TECs.

Mr. Devlin: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that unit costs and the availability of placements will not be the same for employers in different parts of the country? I know that he recently considered this matter at a meeting with the northern TECs, but will he further consider the plight of some regions where costs are slightly higher than in, say, the south-east?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend that unit costs are not always the same in all parts of the country. I hope that he agrees that that does not mean that differences that are difficult to justify should be perpetuated indefinitely. We have a duty to obtain the best value for money for the taxpayer. That frequently means that some of our negotiations are tough.

Mr. Blair: Is not the real problem facing many TECs the fact that their funds are being cut at a time of recession and rapidly rising unemployment? Will the Secretary of State now answer for the record the question that he has consistently refused to answer? How many employment training and youth training places have been cut in the past two years? How many fewer places are there today than there were two years ago?

Mr. Howard: The point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) related to unit costs. The allegations that have been made by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) go further and further into the realms of fantasy. We are continuing to deliver the youth training guarantee. We are making sure that employment training is making its full contribution to the aim and guarantee groups for the long-term unemployed. Such comments come a bit rich from the Opposition, when they have opposed each and every training initiative that we have introduced during the past 12 years and when we are spending two and a half times as much in real terms as the Labour Government did.

Unemployment (Leicester)

2. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current level of unemployment in the city of Leicester; and by what numbers and what percentage it changed in 1990.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): In December 1991, unemployment in the Leicester local authority district was 16,421 on the unadjusted basis. During the year to December 1990—the year about which the hon. and learned Gentleman asked—unemployment regrettably increased by 1,941, or 20 per cent.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister recognise the terrible burden that increasing unemployment in the city of Leicester and elsewhere places on the people involved and their families? Some of the unemployed are young, some are old and many have never been unemployed in their life. Does the Minister accept the definition that recession is when someone else is out of work, depression is when one is out of work oneself, and the only hope of recovery will be when the Government are out of work?

Mr. Jackson: Of course we understand the difficult position in which unemployment places many people. The hon. and learned Gentleman made an epigram out of it. He picked up the word "depression". One of the psychological problems associated with unemployment is depression, and the range of measures that we have put in place to assist unemployed people can help with it. One example is job clubs. I visited one yesterday. They are successful and helpful devices to help people out of the isolation of unemployment. The fact is that 25 per cent. of people who sign on at our jobcentres leave the register within a month, 50 per cent. leave the register within three months and two thirds leave the register within six months; so there is a flow through the unemployment register.

Industrial Disputes

3. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many days were lost in industrial disputes in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): There were 765,000 working days lost in the 12 months to November 1991. This is the lowest total for the same period for more than 70 years.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that that figure is a vindication of the Government's step-by-step approach to the reform of industrial relations? Does he further agree that the time has come for a period of consolidation?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is correct. Those dramatic figures reflect several things, not least the steady and progressive reform that the Government have undertaken in industrial relations. That reform has also given us one of the most successful inward investment records of any country, certainly in the European Community and arguably in the world. Who can dispute the fact that, if the figures were not as I have just announced and if industrial relations had not improved, we could not have attracted our record level of inward investment from across the world? That investment has created many well-paid and well-founded jobs for our people.

Mr. Lewis: Should not those figures be considered alongside the 352 million lost days which have been engineered by the Government since 1979?

Mr. Forth: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman means, but I regret that, as ever—and typically of Labour Members—the hon. Gentleman seems to glory in gloom and despondency in identifying the more negative aspects of things, rather than looking at the positive. As a country, how can we expect to attract inward investment and have the confidence of overseas investors if we hear such remarks from Labour Members?

Mr. Dickens: Do not the figures also herald the demise of the flying pickets, rent-a-mobs, people with crowbars, people who fire ball bearings at horses and place cheesewire across the throats of horses and people who drop concrete slabs off bridges, all of which would stop inward investment into the United Kingdom? Those days have gone, thanks to our measures.

Mr. Forth: Those days have gone only so long as a Government are in power who are determined to continue a regime of common sense and reasonable and balanced industrial relations. If there were ever a Government who had a different view of industrial relations and a different relationship with the trade unions, who knows whether events such as my hon. Friend mentioned might not occur again?

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister agree that, as Northern Ireland has the fewest days lost through stoppages or industrial action and is governed by the same industrial relations legislation as Great Britain, it should be in a special position to attract inward investment?

Mr. Forth: Yes. I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman has brought to the attention of the House and of the world outside the fact that Northern Ireland has so much to offer as an area for investment, both from the rest of the United Kingdom and from beyond. That, together with the strenuous efforts made by everyone in Northern Ireland at local and provincial levels, means that we can look to the future with some confidence, and I am delighted to endorse what the hon. Gentleman said.

Holloway Employment Office

4. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest available figure for registered unemployed and recorded vacancies at the Holloway employment office and jobcentre; and what was the equivalent figure for January 1987.

Mr. Jackson: There were 11,978 unemployed claimants and 32 jobcentre vacancies remaining unfilled in the Holloway area in December 1991, on the unadjusted basis. That compares with 13,221 unemployed claimants and 241 unfilled vacancies in January 1987. The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to know that unemployment in the Holloway area has fallen since 1987.

Mr. Corbyn: Unemployment may well have fallen since 1987, but it has increased a great deal in the past year. Will the Minister explain what he is going to say to the people of the Holloway area who find themselves in the unenviable position of having the jobcentre with the largest gap between the number of vacancies and the number of registered unemployed? There are just 32 vacancies. Will he assure the people of that area that there will be an increase in employment opportunities and an end to the public spending cuts in the area, and will he guarantee the continuation of the job club, which is threatened with closure?

Mr. Jackson: I shall certainly look into the position of the job club. Jobcentres are not the only places where vacancies are available. The fact is that last month the increase in the total number of vacancies notified to jobcentres throughout the country was the highest on record.

Mr. Leighton: The Minister will know that the Holloway area includes a prison and that the admirable Apex Trust works in that area. Is he aware that the chief inspector of prisons, Judge Tumim, has deplored any possible demise of the Apex Trust, that the Archbishop of Canterbury is raising private funds for the trust and that the Secretary of State received an all-party delegation to ask for a rescue package for it? What assurances can the Minister give the House that the valuable experience of the Apex Trust over 27 years is not to be destroyed?

Mr. Jackson: I know from my personal experience of the valuable work that Apex has been doing. The administrator looking into the affairs of the Apex Trust will come forward with proposals, and when we see them we shall consider them. At this stage, we are not in a position to say anything about them.

Strikes

5. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many days were lost in strikes in the 10 years prior to 1979 and the 10 years since.

Mr. Forth: There were 72 million working days lost in the 1980s, nearly one third of which—22·3 million—were lost in the 1984 miners' strike alone. The total for the 1970s was 129 million, nearly twice that for the 1980s.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and for those sensational figures. Does he agree that that improvement has occurred because we—the Government—have given the unions back to their members? Does he further agree that the Labour party wants to sign up to the social chapter only in order to regain its power by having beer and sandwiches at No. 10? Is that what the past is all about—the 156 Members sponsored by unions who are turned on by that prospect?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out what is blindingly obvious to Conservative Members but escapes Opposition Members—our reforms have been to do with giving power to individual trade union members and restoring accountability and responsibility to trade unions and their leaders. Much though my hon. Friend may dream about the days of beer and sandwiches, I should have thought that the Opposition were so besotted with Europe that it would have to be café and croissants, if that change ever came about.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Dennis Skinner. Happy Birthday!

Several Hon. Members: Happy Birthday.

Mr. Skinner: For the first 10 years of the Government, the cry that used to come from the Dispatch Box was that the economy was in a mess because of strikes by workers. Who is causing the slump now?

Mr. Forth: I do not recall any such incidents, but the economic difficulties that we inherited between 1979 and 1980 were indisputably due to the winter of discontent, which was a direct result of the relationship between the then Labour Government and the then trade unions. We now have a different trade union movement and a different Government, with the result that the figures show an all-time record of peace in industrial relations. That is the difference.

Citizens Charter

6. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on how the citizens charter will affect matters relating to his Department.

Mr. Forth: The Department is meeting all the commitments that we made in the citizens charter White Paper. The Employment Service has published the jobseekers charter setting out clearly the high standards of service which the public can expect in all its offices. Charter principles are being applied to all areas of the Department's work.

Mr. Riddick: Is not the jobseekers charter further evidence of the Government's clear commitment to improve public services? I notice that the Minister is wearing his name badge. Of course, he is well known to everyone in the House and to many people outside. Will he assure me that my unemployed constituents will no longer be dealt with by faceless bureaucrats but will be dealt with by individuals who are clearly identifiable and that my unemployed constituents will be treated as individuals?

Mr. Forth: I am delighted to confirm that we will do as my hon. Friend has asked. He shows his usual great concern about the level of service given by the Huddersfield jobcentre to his constituents. I assure him that those constituents who seek help from our staff in the Huddersfield jobcentre, and in other jobcentres throughout the country, will find that the charter means that they can identify the people with whom they are dealing because they are wearing name identification badges. There will be targets for waiting times, for answering calls and for the promptness and accuracy of benefit payments and customer satisfaction surveys will be carried out. The charter will give people who use public services the opportunity to judge the quality of the service and to seek redress, if that quality of service is not offered. That is a major advance in the concept of public service of which the Government are rightly proud.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Whatever the citizens charter is or is not meant to do, will the Minister assure us that it is certainly not meant to replace his Department's statutory obligations in relation to the tragic accidents with which the Health and Safety Executive should deal? I am grateful to the Minister and to his Department for the speed with which they dispatched members of the Health and Safety Executive to the scene of the tragedy in my constituency at BP Grangemouth yesterday. Sadly, one of my constituents lost his life in that tragic explosion. Will the Minister ensure that his Department keeps me advised of all developments relating to that sad event?

Mr. Forth: I join the hon. Gentleman in expressing our sorrow at that tragic loss. Regrettably, too many people lose their lives in the construction industry which, as is well known, is one of the most hazardous industries. Together with the HSE, we are constantly working to improve safety levels. I gladly give the undertaking for which the hon. Gentleman asks and we will keep him well informed of the findings that emerge from this most recent accident. On that basis, we have asked the Health and Safety Executive and the Health and Safety Commission to consider what contribution they can make to the overall citizens charter initiative to ensure that companies or individuals—whichever are concerned—have the same rights with regard to those organisations as they have with regard to other government and quasi-governmental bodies. That is something that we are keen to see, and I am confident of getting a positive response from the executive and the commission shortly.

YTS (Eccles)

7. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the number of youth training scheme places available in Eccles.

Mr. Jackson: Management of youth training in Eccles is the responsibility of the Manchester training and enterprise council. In the current year, the training and enterprise council has a youth training budget of £16·1 million, and about 7,430 young people are currently in training.

Miss Lestor: Will the Minister cast his mind back to the letter that he wrote to me last October—a soothing reply to the representations that I had made to him—pointing out that the Salford careers service, which covers my constituency, had forecast a shortfall of between 400 and 450 YTS places? As I say, his reply was most soothing. May I inform him, as he has not answered my question, that the same careers service says that nothing has changed and that the same number of young people will not get YTS places, that many of them are fed up with turning up, only to be told that nothing is available and that the continued recession and closures mean that hundreds of them will have nothing to do?

Mr. Jackson: We followed up the representations that were made by the hon. Lady and by others on that point, and the regional offices of the Department of Employment have been in negotiation with TECs to try to establish the extent to which they need additional resources to meet the YT guarantee. That has taken place throughout the country and has led to substantial additional resources being provided. I shall be happy to reconsider the position in Manchester and Eccles, although I know that it is being carefully considered.

There is an issue, which the hon. Lady must recognise, involving the careers service figures. There has been a great national exercise, co-ordinated by the careers service nationally and by my Department, to establish the true position. It is accepted by the careers service that the figures are rather crude, that they consist of people who register an interest in YT and that there are various problems about counting those people as actual demands for YT places.

Employment Action (Basildon)

8. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to visit employment action training services in Basildon to discuss the quality of provision.

Mr. Jackson: Although we are carrying out an extensive programme of regional visits, neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor myself, alas, plan to visit Basildon in the immediate future. I know that employment action is operating well in Essex. The Essex training and enterprise council is to be congratulated on its efforts to get the employment action initiative off the ground so quickly.

Mr. Amess: Is my hon. Friend aware that I opened J. and J. Training Services in my constituency last week and that its programme is already providing an environmental study centre at Basildon zoo, a garden for St. Luke's hospice at Basildon hospital and recreational facilities for the Charitable Printers Trust and that it is restoring old churches in my constituency? Does my hon. Friend agree that such a programme not only provides high-quality training but helps to enhance life in our local communities?

Mr. Jackson: I agree with all those points, and the Essex TEC is to be congratulated on its success in getting those programmes off the ground. Particularly important is the contribution that EA will make to ensure that unemployed people are given an opportunity to keep their work skills and work records up to date.

Labour Statistics

9. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the increase in United Kingdom unemployment during the past 12 months.

Mr. Howard: United Kingdom seasonally adjusted unemployment rose by 703,700 in the year to December 1991.

Mr. McAllion: Is the Secretary of State aware that the management of the Albacom factory in Dundee are taking advantage of the circumstances of mass unemployment by sacking more than 100 members of the work force for the crime of taking industrial action, within the terms of the Government's employment laws? Will he join me and civic and religious leaders in the Dundee area in condemning such management action as an affront to natural justice? Will he also explain why we have one of the few remaining Governments who still refuse to give legal protection to workers when they take legitimate and justified industrial action?

Mr. Howard: I am not aware of the circumstances of the particular case to which the hon. Gentleman refers. If he will write to me about it, I will look into it. It has always been the law in this country—including under the previous Labour Government, even when the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) held my office—that if people broke their contract of employment and went on strike, it was legitimate for them to be dismissed. That has always been the position, but I shall look into the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Sir Michael Neubert: Does my right hon. and learned Friend share my concern about the disproportionate impact of unemployment on the construction industry, which it is estimated will have lost 250,000 building operatives, some perhaps never to return? Will he do all he can, through the Construction Industry Training Board, to ensure that an adequate supply of skill is available to meet the demands of recovery in the longer term?

Mr. Howard: Yes, I certainly share my hon. Friend's concern. The Construction Industry Training Board is doing an excellent job in difficult circumstances. It is doing all that it can to ensure that skilled people will be available to meet the demands that will undoubtedly be made on the construction industry as the economy recovers from recession.

Mr. O'Hara: Can the Secretary of State offer any advice to the daughter of a constituent of mine who has recently become an unemployment statistic? She is a highly qualified research scientist whose contract, funded by the pharmaceutical industry, has come to an end. Having signed on and said that she was looking for a job as a research scientist, she was advised that she should think again. When she asked what she should think again about, she was advised to train for office work. What advice would the Secretary of State offer that young lady, apart from consulting the job seekers charter?

Mr. Howard: A wider range of help is available for unemployed people now than ever before. Those who work extremely hard in our jobcentres give the best advice available to individuals who come in. Unemployed people now have individual interviews and help in preparing a back-to-work plan. Those who advised the hon. Gentleman's constituent no doubt knew the circumstances of that locality far better than I do.

Mrs. Currie: Does the Secretary of State agree that, to obtain a balanced view, we must consider not only unemployment but employment and self-employment, which grew steadily during the 1980s under the Government and is set to grow further in the 1990s under the same Government? Is he aware that, when I asked about the growth in employment in south Derbyshire recently, I was told that figures were available only until 1989, that they are collected only once every six years and that figures for self-employment are collected only once every 10 years? Surely that is not good enough.

Mr. Howard: I rather agree with my hon. Friend. We hope to make those figures available, on a localised basis, much more regularly and frequently in the future. However, national and international figures are available and they show that a greater proportion of this country's work force is in work than in any other European Community country except Denmark. We do not hear much about that from the Opposition.

Mr. McLeish: Will the Secretary of State come clean and say why his Government have the worst jobs record of any post-war Government in Britain? Why have 2·4 million manufacturing jobs disappeared since 1979? Why has unemployment risen by 1·45 million since 1979? Tory polices do not work and the tragedy is that, in Britain every month, 30,000 people join the dole. When will he do something about that deplorable record?

Mr. Howard: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the fact that unemployment has been rising in most European Community countries and that it is higher than it was a year ago in every EFTA and G7 country. If he was really concerned about unemployment, he would persuade the Labour party to abandon its minimum wage and jobs tax proposals and its embracing of the European Community social charter, all of which would add hundreds of thousands of people to the dole queues.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that some of the unemployment has been brought about by the so-called peace dividend? Would he care to contemplate what unemployment in Scotland would be if the bases at Leuchars, Lossiemouth, Kinloss, Rosyth and Coulport were to close and if Rolls-Royce, Yarrow, British Aerospace and other defence manufacturers did not receive work because Scotland was a separatist country?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. I am sure that it will be fully appreciated by the people of Scotland when they assess the parties' policies at the election, including the policies of those who advocate a lesser or greater degree of Scotland's separation from the rest of the United Kingdom. Those policies and their effects will weigh heavily in the balance.

10. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of people in the United Kingdom who are economically active, unemployed and not receiving unemployment benefit.

Mr. Howard: In spring 1990, there were 870,000 people in the United Kingdom unemployed on the internationally recognised International Labour Organisation definition, but not included in the monthly claimant count statistics. That compares with 540,000 people in the claimant count who were not unemployed by the ILO definition.

Mr. Evans: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that that incredible figure does not tell the entire story? Will he confim that if unemployment figures were counted today on the same basis as they were in 1979 employment Ministers would be forced to stand at the Dispatch Box and admit that the number of economically active people who are unemployed in Great Britain today is 3·75 million?

Mr. Howard: No. I certainly do not accept that. I do not see any basis for the figure that the hon. Gentleman advances. It certainly has no basis in the figures that I have just given him in answer to his question. As the hon. Gentleman knows, whenever we make comparisons the figures that we quote are adjusted backwards to ensure that we quote them on a truly comparable basis in all instances.

Mr. Alexander: Since the Opposition, clearly, try to make the worst of the current figures, would it not give a truer picture if we looked at the figures of only five years back? Is it not the case that in the east midlands, my area, for example, unemployment is 30,000 fewer than five years ago?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right and I agree with him. Not only do the Opposition always seek to make the worst of the figures, but they would make the figures very much worse if they ever had the opportunity to put their disastrous policies into effect.

11. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons are currently unemployed and claiming benefit.

Mr. Howard: On the seasonally adjusted basis there were 2,546,000 unemployed claimants in December 1991.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the Secretary of State realise that the British people have rumbled him and his colleagues? They know the true level of unemployment. They know about the misery of people who are unemployed, but are not even counted in the unemployment figures because of the way in which the Government have fiddled those figures. Before the Secretary of State rattles on yet again about European figures, our minimum wage policy and our alleged doom and gloom, and as he has proved himself completely unable to say anything constructive, will he today at least ask the Prime Minister to chuck it in now, call an election and let us get on with the job?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Lady knew what was available to those of her constituents who are unemployed, she would know that we offer a wider range of help to unemployed people than has ever been available in this country before. About half of those who are unfortunate enough to lose their jobs leave unemployment within three months. We are doing everything we can to keep that period of time to a minimum. Instead of dwelling on portraying the figures in the worst possible light, she should work with us to reduce that time.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that unemployment across the whole of the European Community is higher than any of us would like? Does he accept that the way to solve the problem is for workers to provide goods and services that are competitively priced? Does he welcome today's news that factory output prices are the lowest for many years?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend has correctly identified that it is only by constantly improving the competitiveness of British industry that jobs will be created. We have in place a framework that will ensure that this country is uniquely advantaged to make the most of the opportunities that will become available in the 1990s. As we emerge from the recession that will become increasingly apparent.

Training Programmes

12. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from the chairmen of the north-west training and enterprise councils concerning the level of funding of training programmes.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have frequent meetings with TEC chairmen from all parts of the country, in which we discuss a range of issues, including questions of funding.

Mr. McCartney: When the Under-Secretary met the TEC chairman did he apologise for the 97 per cent. increase in unemployment in the north-west since the Government took over? Furthermore, did he give a commitment to replace the 8 per cent. cut in the youth training budget for this year, which is in addition to the 12 per cent. cut last year? Does he accept that, as the TEC chairmen advised him, if that money is not replaced, some TECs will not be able to meet the guarantee of a youth training place in some places in Greater Manchester in Lancashire? Is it not an indictment of this Government that, with the high levels of unemployment, young people cannot get a grant-aided training course?

Mr. Jackson: TECs throughout the country are currently deep in negotiations with the regional offices of my Department. I do not think that it would be appropriate for Ministers to get involved in those local negotiations, least of all from this Dispatch Box. Since the hon. Gentleman mentioned YT in particular, I may say that we are investing £842 million in YT in 1991-92 and the figure for the year starting in April is £851 million. We are committed to the YT guarantee and we are providing the funds to honour it.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. Friend agree that many leaders of local industry are giving their time and experience to ensure the great success of TECs all over the United Kingdom and that it is imperative that we, the Government, ensure that they are properly funded?

Mr. Jackson: I note what my hon. Friend says and I share his appreciation of the immense efforts being made by TEC board members from business and from other sectors of the community throughout the country. What he had to say about funding is duly noted. We are currently in discussion with the TECs about their budget and I do not think that it would be appropriate for me to comment on the particular circumstances of my hon. Friend's local TEC.

Mr. Wareing: If the Government are so committed to training, how does the hon. Gentleman explain the letter from the Merseyside TEC to Hexagon Community Ltd. in my constituency, telling it that output-related funding is to be cut by 25 per cent. next year? I received a telephone call just before Question Time telling me that that enterprise will have to close. This is in an area of very high unemployment. When the Government mouth words like "people", "jobs" and "training", they should try to convince us that it is more than hypocrisy.

Mr. Jackson: I have had a letter this morning from Hexagon training and I shall be answering it in due course. The relationship between particular providers and particular TECs must be a matter of negotiation between them. Neither of us is in a position to make a judgment about that situation. But I shall certainly be looking into the circumstances of the provider who has written to me.

Courts (Sequestration Power)

13. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to alter the power of the courts to sequestrate the assets of trade unions.

Mr. Forth: None. Sequestration is a penalty which courts may impose where an organisation or individual commits contempt of court. It is an essential ingredient in the range of measures which may be needed to discourage such contempt.

Mr. Janman: Does my hon. Friend agree that the ability of employers to take out injunctions to prevent unofficial strike action and the ability of the courts to sequester the funds of unions that ignore such injunctions can act as a very firm and much-needed last line of defence against industrial anarchy? Does he agree that it would be an act of the most amazing folly to tamper with the provisions that currently apply, and yet that is exactly what the Opposition are committed to doing if they win the general election?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has made a very important point, which I suspect will become more important as we approach the coming election. It is quite clear that this power available to the courts is essential to deal with contempt of court when it emerges as a result of abuse of trade union power or trade union positions. For any political party that makes any pretence of seeking the government of this country to want to remove from the courts the sanction that my hon. Friend has described as so essential is utterly irresponsible. It gives the lie to the real relationship that exists between the Labour party and the trade unions, and that will not go unnoticed. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members to give a fair hearing to the last few questions.

Skill Training

14. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the skill training programme.

Mr. Jackson: There is no central Government programme under the label "skills training", but we are, of course, committed to ensuring that high-quality skills training is provided for the 380,000 people who are currently participating in Government-funded training programmes throughout England and Wales.

Mr. Hughes: Is the Minister aware that Japanese employers in Wales recently expressed concern about the level of skills of possible recruits? Is he also aware that human skills are the major determinant of success or failure? Is not it a sad reflection on the Government that after 12 years they have failed to provide the necessary skills training for our work force to make our industries competitive in world markets?

Mr. Jackson: That charge, coming from an Opposition Member, is quite unacceptable. More than 3·1 million young people have taken part in youth training since 1983. In 1979, when we came to office, only 6,000 young people were on training programmes sponsored by the then Labour Government.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that employers and the TECs should be congratulated on the fact that, despite difficult economic circumstances, they are continuing to train people for the period, which will shortly come, when under a Conservative Government we shall be re-expanding the economy and employment?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is right. The regular CBI surveys and the regular Department of Employment labour force survey show that over the 1980s—this is the answer to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes)—there has been a consistent increase in employers' commitment to training, even in this current recession.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. MacKay: In the light of yesterday's public sector pay settlements, which were particularly welcomed by teachers, will my right hon. Friend give the House some broad indication of just how many teachers will now be earning more than £20,280 a year? Will he also use this opportunity to give a categorical pledge that under no circumstances will he lift the ceiling on national insurance contributions, because that would, in effect, claw back the extra pay that teachers gained yesterday?

The Prime Minister: I can tell my hon. Friend that well over 120,000 teachers exceeded £20,000 a year even before yesterday's pay increases. We anticipate that something over an extra 50,000 will now do so. I can confirm to my hon. Friend that we will not remove the limit and impose an extra 9 per cent. national insurance on those teachers.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister join me in reaffirming that no group either using or supporting violence will be allowed by any Government to bomb its way to the conference table? Does he agree that when terrorists inflict danger and disruption on ordinary people anywhere—in Britain, Northern Ireland or anywhere else —they are not so much demonstrating their support for any cause as demonstrating their hatred and opposition to every community?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. I am happy to agree without reservation with the points put to the House by the right hon. Gentleman. If terrorists believe that incidents like this morning's will deflect our policy on Northern Ireland, they are mistaken. They have not been successful in the past, and they will not be successful in the future.

Q2. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stewart: When I last had the opportunity to question my right hon. Friend, he confirmed that under the Conservatives, miners and other earners in my constituency would not pay a higher rate of income tax. Can he confirm that he will not extend national insurance contributions to savings, because a large number of my constituents took early retirement from the coal industry and use their savings to supplement their income?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend that guarantee. Conservative Governments have reduced the taxation on savings. We have abolished the investment income surcharge, and have cut the standard rate of income tax to 25p in the pound. We have introduced savings schemes such as TESSAs, and we believe that excess taxation is iniquitous when we seek to encourage people both to save and to invest in our economy.

Mr. Lewis: Does the Prime Minister recall that in 1986 he announced the closure of DHSS resettlement centres and gave a firm promise that they would not close until alternative accommodation was available? Is he now aware that four centres, including the Walkden centre in my constituency, will close next month and that alternative provision is not yet available and will not be available? Is the right hon. Gentleman, therefore, going to allow the Resettlement Agency to rat upon his pledge or is he not?

The Prime Minister: I set out at the time the details of the areas where we would see new and better facilities reopening, and those better facilities have reopened. In addition, the hon. Gentleman may be aware that the Government are also spending very nearly £100 million over three years to provide accommodation for people who are homeless in London. So far nearly 2,000 extra bed spaces have been provided, and the number of people who are out on the streets is substantially lower than 12 months ago. The hon. Gentleman would do well to acknowledge those facts.

Southampton

Q3. **Mr. Hill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will visit the city and port of Southampton.

The Prime Minister: Tomorrow.

Mr. Hill: When my right hon. Friend visits the port of Southampton he will realise that two Conservative policies have changed the position of the port from stagnation to prosperity. The first policy was privatisation and the second the abolition of the national dock labour scheme. All the hospitals in Southampton have been rebuilt over the past few years. There is only one fly in the ointment —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the hon. Gentleman ask his question—but briefly please.

Mr. Hill: My right hon. Friend will know that there is a Labour-controlled council. Not only are its policies extremely wasteful, but one of the companies that it set up is just collapsing, insolvent, and this is costing £8 a head to every community charge payer in the area.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend puts his point with great clarity and in some detail. Southampton is already part of a highly successful privatised group of ports. In some of the privatised ports, ending restrictive practices has led to an improvement in productivity of 50 to 100 per cent.

Engagements

Q4. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: Is the Prime Minister aware that, after a little local difficulty in the House, there was a meeting this morning between the Engineering Employers Federation and the northern group of Labour Members, at which one of the representatives of the federation said that the Department of Trade and Industry suffered from inertia? Will the Prime Minister consider removing this inertia from the DTI by sacking his Secretary of State?

The Prime Minister: No.

Q5. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: Does the Prime Minister agree that there is an increasing role for responsibility and involvement of individuals in improving their career prospects, whether through training credits for young people or through performance-related pay? Are these not better ways of improving the skills of British industry than the rigid structures favoured by the feudal barons of the trade union movement?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the point made by my hon. Friend. I entirely agree with the training credit principle which puts buying power in the hands of the people who seek training. If my hon. Friend will be patient, I think that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will shortly have some comments which will please him.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Has the Prime Minister seen today's *Financial Times*? If he has, has he noted the three pages of advertisements by receivers and administrators of companies that have failed? The exercise is repeated in the columns of the *Financial Times* three times a week. Is it not clear that, in the light of all these industrial failures, it is the failure of the Government which really needs to be brought to account, and that it is the Government's task to put things right?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the essential basics to make sure that things are right are to keep inflation down, to keep interest rates down, to have the right tax structure and to continue with the improved industrial relations that we have had in recent years. With his experience, the right hon. Gentleman will also be interested in the views of the CBI. If he is, he will know that the CBI opposes absolutely the reintroduction of the labour laws that the Opposition propose, the tax changes that the Opposition propose and the minimum wage that the Opposition have in mind. Each of those policies would be deadly to the future of British industry, British jobs and British companies.

Q6. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir Anthony Grant: Will my right hon. Friend warn other world leaders, especially in the United States, of the dangers of a wave of trade protectionism and the catastrophic effect that it can have on the world economy in a recession? Will he emphasise to the Americans in particular the need to reach sensible agreements within GATT?

The Prime Minister: I have had the opportunity of discussing that with President Bush on a number of occasions, and he is as committed to a speedy conclusion of the Uruguay round as we are. I believe that that is vital. The paper set out by Mr. Dunkel provides a basis round which the United States, the Cairns group and the European Community could rally to provide a satisfactory settlement. That settlement is as vital for the future of the international trading organisation as any other matter under consideration.

Q7. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Martlew: In a response to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on Thursday, the Prime Minister made it clear that he would not be supporting the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill, which will come before the House on Friday, but did not clarify whether he is in favour of a ban on fox hunting. Will he take this opportunity to tell the House and the country whether he favours such a ban?

The Prime Minister: We always examine legislation before the House with great care. The Bill before the House is not adequate.

Dame Jill Knight: In connection with an incident that my right hon. Friend has mentioned already, is he aware that hon. Members and staff were unable to work in their offices at 1 Parliament street between 9.30 and 12.30 because of three IRA bombs placed in Whitehall? Is he further aware that immediately the road was made safe, but before any traffic was allowed to pass, there was a demonstration by IRA supporters, well equipped with banners and placards? Does he not feel that, as they were so ready to move and so well equipped, they knew all about the IRA bombs and probably the timing as well? Will he ensure that the police are given the photographs of that demonstration, taken close up by the media?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware—I have not yet received reports—of that demonstration, but I believe that it is ironic that the IRA and its supporters should at the same time be enjoying the privileges of democracy and using the methods of terrorism. I can assure them that they will have no progress until they renounce violence and terrorism. I believe that that is the united view of all the parties in the House.

Q8. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Grocott: Does the Prime Minister recall that it is now more than 12 months since he first started dithering about the election date, since when 750,000 peole have lost their jobs? Is it not about time that he said to the 44 million voters who are sick and tired of the phoney election campaign that the general election will be on 9 April? When will he have the courage to say that?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will know that in the last year we have also cut interest rates seven times and halved inflation. I have no doubt that when we come to the election the electorate will have spotted that as well.

Mr. Marland: Is my right hon. Friend aware that he is the first Prime Minister in history to attend the annual general meeting of the National Farmers Union? Is he aware that the warmth of his reception was genuine, as the farmers very much appreciate his understanding of their difficulties with the planners and with marketing? Is he aware that they welcome his determination to do all he can to improve their lot, both at home and abroad?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I certainly enjoyed my attendance at the National Farmers Union meeting this morning. I was able to talk to the farmers about the difficulties that their industry faces at the moment, the need for reform of that industry and the importance that farming will undoubtedly have in the future of our country.

Q9. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some months ago.

Mrs. Adams: Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that I, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), recently wrote to him pointing out that the Paisley post code area lost 76 per cent. of its manufacturing jobs between 1979 and 1989 and a further 3,600 jobs since then? Does he recall that he replied that he did not consider those circumstances grim enough to undertake an economic initiative for Paisley? Will he now change his mind or shall we have to wait for the people to do that for him?

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Lady ought to be clear about what she means by assistance. When the Labour party speaks of incentives it means subsidies. Perhaps the hon. Lady will remember the success rate of the National Enterprise Board. It invested in 102 firms, of which one third went bankrupt or went into receivership. Less than one third of those firms returned the taxpayers' investment. The right way to help manufacturing industry is to produce the right level of inflation and the right economy for people to make their own decisions.

"People, Jobs and Opportunity"

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the White Paper "People, Jobs and Opportunity" which I and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales are publishing today.

The White Paper highlights the momentous changes which are taking place in the nature and patterns of work; it describes the implications of those changes for the future direction of our policies; and it sets out a new agenda for action designed to widen even further the opportunities and choices for people at work.

A key feature of the last 10 years has been a new and growing emphasis on the role and importance of the individual employee to business success. Employers are increasingly recognising and responding to the aspirations of their individual employees and rewarding individual performance. People at work have new opportunities to choose working arrangements which suit them and their families; to have a say in the direction of the organisation for which they work; and to influence their own development. The tide of collectivism—based on trade union representation and collective bargaining—has been decisively reversed.

If we are to meet the competitive challenge of this decade we must build upon the changes which are taking place. We must open up new opportunities for people at work. We must enable the potential of each and every individual person to be released. That is the vital task for the 1990s. This White Paper sets out what needs to be done. It contains 14 new proposals. I shall confine myself this afternoon to a summary of the most important.

First, we propose a number of possible changes to employment law to extend the rights of individuals. These proposals, on which we would welcome views, will enable people at work to get more comprehensive information from their employer about their terms and conditions of employment including any changes to them, and information about the training they will receive. We shall also be consulting on whether to clarify the law relating to training contracts. This would make it clear that it would be open to employers and employees to agree that if an employee left his employment prematurely after the employer had made a substantial investment in his training, the employer could recover a reasonable proportion of the costs.

At the same time we shall continue to oppose proposals for excessive regulation of relationships between employers and employees which would threaten our competitiveness and put jobs at risk.

Secondly, we shall continue to promote the development, by voluntary means, of employee involvement and of responsive and flexible pay arrangements which reward individual achievement. And we shall oppose attempts by the European Commission to impose inflexible and uniform models of employee relations.

Thirdly, we shall encourage the spread of new and more flexible ways for people to learn and train at their own pace in their own time. We shall enable libraries to make available to the public vocational learning materials and back-up services. We shall also test out a new system of credits to enable unemployed people to purchase training materials which they can use at home and so combine learning with active jobsearch.

Fourthly, we shall continue to tailor the help that we offer to unemployed people to the needs of individuals. And we are already expanding the special help available in 1992-93 through our employment and training programmes so that almost a million people can benefit.

Fifthly, we shall work with other member states for a European Community which supports an increase in the number of jobs available, respects the diversity of employment practices and gives individual people the freedom and opportunity to choose working patterns and arrangements which suit them. During our presidency of the Community in the second half of 1992 we shall promote a new employment initiative—to share good practice between member states in helping unemployed people back to work and to push discussion of employment and unemployment issues higher up the European agenda.

Finally, in May last year my right hon. Friends and I published White Papers about our plans for the education and training of young people into the next century. We announced our aim by 1996 to provide training credits to all 16 and 17-year-olds leaving full-time education. Training credits signal a revolution in the way in which the Government support training and development—a revolution which gives young people the power to choose the path which suits them best.

Today I am announcing an important new initiative to provide credits to people in the adult work force. Individuals will be able to use the credits to purchase a "skill check" where, with expert advice and guidance, they will be helped to take stock of their existing skills and experience, identify how they can improve their skills and map out their future training and career options. By placing purchasing power in the hands of the people concerned we shall transform their attitude to training and to the opportunities that are available to them.

The initiative—*[Interruption.]* The reaction of Opposition Members shows how much they really care about these vital matters that affect the future of our people. The initiative, which will be introduced from April 1993, will be run locally by training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies in Scotland, which we shall be consulting about the precise arrangements. Our plans will benefit a quarter of a million people in the first two years. If the initiative is successful and cost-effective, we shall extend it across the country.

The issues discussed in this White Paper are vital to our future. My aim is to help to create ladders of opportunity for all our people—ladders which start at school and continue throughout working life. Qualifications must be made available to the millions of people who have always regarded qualifications as being to do with other people, not them. And we must provide a framework within which individual achievement and national prosperity go hand in hand.

We have already achieved a great deal. This White Paper charts the way forward. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): First, let me deal with some of the points of policy—in so far as there are any.

The news of greater access to adult careers guidance is, of course, agreeable, but would it not be better to try to extend such access to everyone in the Community, unemployed or employed, through the careers service? As for the proposal for adult credits—which obviously mirrors the youth training credits idea—is it true that, as has been said in some of the newspapers, no extra resources will be provided for the programme? If it is true, and a transfer from existing resources is proposed, where will the cuts be made?

The idea of training programmes being specified in the contract of employment is also perfectly acceptable, but why not follow through the logic of that position and ensure that all young people who leave school and go into work do so with the proper training contract, so that the scandal of hundreds of thousands of young people leaving school and going into dead-end jobs with no training can end forthwith?

The one new proposal that the Secretary of State has advanced—he was very coy about it in his statement, as opposed to the press briefings—is that employees should be liable to pay the cost of the training that they have received if they move to another job. It is proposed that payment should take the form of either a financial penalty incurred by the employee or a transfer fee to be paid by the recruiting employer.

That proposal, surely, represents a fairly fundamental concession on the part of the Secretary of State—the admission that a purely voluntary approach will not work. We welcome that concession. Unfortunately, having identified the problem correctly, the Secretary of State has come up with the wrong solution. The idea of transfer fees has been kicking around the personnel-manager circuit for many years, and has been rejected for at least two reasons.

First, the reasons why employees leave their employment, having received training, may be unconnected with "poaching". An employee may want promotion, for instance, or a spouse or partner may be leaving to find work in another part of the country. Is the Secretary of State seriously contemplating the forcing of a penalty on people in such circumstances? Such action might be utterly unfair, as well as constituting an enormous obstacle to the free movement of labour.

Most people, however, have rejected that proposal as a way forward because of the problems involved in policing such a system, and because the disputes that arise under the training contract are myriad. Apparently, the Secretary of State has proposed in the White Paper that industrial tribunals should take on the role of regulating those disputes. Is he aware that, at present, the waiting time for industrial tribunal decisions is as long as three, four or six months, and sometimes longer? What is an employee supposed to do—wait in a state of suspension while the matter is resolved by a tribunal before changing jobs? The Secretary of State has opened up an interesting line of argument, but I think that he will find it difficult to stop where he is.

Surely, however, there is one fundamental question that the country will ask. The White Paper is entitled "People, Jobs and Opportunity". How can the Secretary of State credibly say that he is protecting people at work when his party alone among all the parties in Europe—Labour or Conservative—opposed the European social charter that guarantees the existence of such standards? Why is the right hon. and learned Gentleman apparently prepared to legislate to give people details of their contracts of employment, while denying them the right to decent terms and conditions of employment that is enjoyed everywhere else in Europe? Why not allow part-time employees to be given the same status as full-time employees? Why not give them the right to a decent holiday entitlement, which is still denied to millions in this country; the right to proper maternity leave; the right to child care; and freedom from discrimination?

The Secretary of State may talk of individual rights, but he cannot understand that, if real justice and opportunity are to be secured for many individuals, they will require a strong and active Community to legislate on their behalf. How can he credibly say that his party defends jobs when only today we have learned that 2,000 jobs are to go at Gateway, 300 at Pottertons in Tyne and Wear, and 300 at Rolls-Royce in Glasgow? One million people have joined the dole queue since the right hon. and learned Gentleman became Secretary of State, yet not one proposal in the White Paper creates a single job for the millions who are out of work.

How can the Secretary of State pose as the Minister of opportunity when over the past four years £465 million has been cut from youth training and £900 million from employment training—and when, all over Britain, the Government's guarantees to the young and the unemployed are being broken even as we speak?

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's is not a party that joins people to jobs and opportunity, but one that has separated millions of people from jobs and denied millions more opportunity. The only jobs that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues are interested in saving over the coming weeks are their own at the election, but, as with so much else over the past 13 years, they will fail in that, too.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful that, on this occasion at least, the hon. Gentleman has found it possible to welcome at least some of the proposals in the White Paper. I shall deal in turn with the various points that he raised.

The hon. Gentleman asked first why the assessment credit, the skill check credit, is not to be made available to unemployed people. The fact is that unemployed people already have access to a range of programmes through the employment service, including job review workshops, which provide precisely that service for those who are unemployed. If the training and enterprise councils think it appropriate to make some of those funds available for unemployed people, they are perfectly free to do so.

As to where the money is to come from, it is true that the proposals will be funded from within my existing resources—[Hon. Members: "Ah."] It is typical of the Labour party that it loses sight of the possibility of being able to get better value for money and of being able to improve the extent to which and the way in which we can help people without always asking the taxpayer to fund more. We shall make the necessary funds available to fund those initiatives. In due course, I shall discuss with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury exactly from where the money is to be found within existing resources.

On training credits, as we have repeatedly made clear, it is perfectly true that the best approach for young people is a voluntary approach. We think that the best approach is to place buying power in the hands of young people. We reject the compulsory route that is favoured by the Labour party, which will never understand that the way forward is to motivate and to encourage and to give people the

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incentives that they need to make the most of the opportunities that are available to them, not simply to rely on the dead hand of compulsion.

On the proposal that the training contract should make it possible for employers to recover the cost of their investment in training, the difficulties to which the hon. Gentleman referred can be reflected in the contract. Far from it being a departure from a voluntary approach, it is a voluntary approach: it depends upon a contractual relationship being agreed between the employer and the employee. The difficulty that has arisen—and one of the obstacles to progress in that area—is that there has been doubt about the law. Many people have thought that such contracts were not enforceable. That is why it is important to clarify the law.

The true attitude of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and the Labour party emerged in his final two points. He talked about the European Commission's social action programme. He is blind to the independent studies that have been carried out on that programme, such as that by Professor Snower of Birkbeck college, which demonstrates clearly and beyond doubt how damaging those proposals would be to the creation of jobs in this country.

In his concluding remarks, the hon. Gentleman had the temerity to talk about the job losses that have been announced today by Gateway. Of course, I regret those job losses, but the hon. Gentleman has surely seen the article in *The Independent on Sunday* a week last Sunday which spelt out clearly the devastating consequences on jobs in the retail trade of his proposal for a national statutory minimum wage. How dare the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party claim to be concerned about jobs when they have put forward a package of proposals that would decimate employment in this country and confine millions of people to the dole queues. The hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of the lip service that he has paid to employment by continuing to outline such policies.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must remind the House that we have a busy day ahead of us, including a ten-minute Bill motion. I will allow questions on the statement to go on until 4.15 pm. I hope that hon. Members will ask questions about the White Paper and not make wider points.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that during the past 25 years successive Governments have never quite got it right on training, which is so essential to our future prosperity? An exception to that is the past few years when we have made significant progress. This White Paper is another jump forward.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend further agree that the Opposition spokesman showed his lamentable inexperience of industry when he talked about poaching? In fact, companies which train properly and successfully over several years bitterly resent other companies which do not indulge in training taking their workers. That is a problem with which my right hon. and learned Friend is trying to cope. The example shows exactly that the Opposition are not in touch with what is going on.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. He speaks with the considerable experience of someone who served as a Minister in the Department of Employment. Perhaps I can confirm what he said by reference to one statistic. Between 1984 and 1990 there was an 85 per cent. increase in the number of people in work receiving training. Of course, more progress needs to be made, but that statistic is some indication of the progress that we are making and have made.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Secretary of State said that he would have to ask the Chief Secretary to the Treasury where the money would come from. He has not told the House how much he expects his proposals to cost, both in the pilot phase, when adult credits will be paid to a quarter of a million people, and later when he hopes to extend the scheme across the country. If the purpose of that is to transform attitudes to training, what effect will the lead handcuff clause that he proposes for the training contract have on attitudes to training? Is he not still missing the real point if he really wants to do something radical to promote opportunities for people at work, and create rights for citizens at work to ownership and participation in decision-making at the place of work?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point. We have taken a considerable number of far-reaching measures in association with the Confederation of British Industry to encourage precisely that course.

As to the cost of the measures, the two-year cost of the skill check initiative will be some £25 million and the cost of the pilot scheme of vouchers to help unemployed people to make use of open learning facilities will be £3 million. As the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, those measures represent only part of our considerable range of initiatives. I do not suggest that these measures alone will revolutionise training in Britain, but, taken in conjunction with other measures that we have taken, the considerable progress made by the training and enterprise councils, together with Investors in People and our national record of achievement, we are certainly well on the way to completing a transformation of attitudes to training in Britain.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I warmly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's statement. Does he accept that many employers, if not the overwhelming majority, support the Government's robust stance against the social clause? A leading textile and clothing employer told me last night that if we implemented the social clause it could cost thousands of jobs within his company.

My right hon. and learned Friend said that many of the new responsibilities that he announced would lie with the TECs. I have an excellent TEC, the South and East Cheshire TEC, which he knows well. Will he assure the House that the necessary funds to enable the TECs to undertake the additional responsibilities that he announced will be provided for those excellent bodies?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I am grateful for his support. It is extraordinary how oblivious the Labour party remains to the extraordinarily damaging consequences of its proposals. Those consequences have been highlighted by my hon. Friend with specific examples from industries within his constituency. I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance for which he asked on resources for TECs for the initiative. There will be a competition to decide which 15 TECs will have responsibility for the initiative, and I expect many bids.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The statement was extremely thin, but it touched on one matter of importance—the fact that some employers spend money on training but others do not: they poach. Instead of leaving that, as hitherto, to market forces, it appears that the Secretary of State wants to intervene; he wants to be dirigiste. Unfortunately, his approach is based on the same argument as that used by the people who built the Berlin wall—"If you leave the people who trained you, you have to pay a penalty".

That is the approach that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has taken, but there is another—that every employer should spend money on training. If they do, we can give freedom to our people. That is the argument for a levy on all employers. It is an argument not for training boards with a lot of bureaucracy, but for the present successful French policy where every employer has to spend money on training. In that way, we would increase national expenditure on training and the Secretary of State would not have to go in for these dictatorial measures.

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that the remarks of the hon. Members for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) and for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) about market forces only go to show how little they understand them. Market forces are based on contract, and the proposal that I advanced would clarify the law to make it possible for people to enter into contracts, which would have the consequences that I described.

As to a levy, I am surprised that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East, with his experience as Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment, is not aware of the experience of employers throughout the country who sought to operate the levy that we used to have, which was recognised on all sides as a failure. It led to employers spending time in filling up forms and trying to ensure that every conceivable expense was lumped together under the heading of training instead of concentrating on the training itself. There could be no clearer example of the Opposition's blind and blinkered approach to these matters than that proposal.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): As an employer, may I say that the greatest single obstacle to providing training is the possibility that someone else will take away one's trainee and thereby render one's investment worthless? May I suggest to my right hon. and learned Friend that the explanation for the ill-tempered ignorance with which his proposals have been greeted today is that Opposition Members are, for the most part, neither employers on the one hand, nor employable on the other?

Mr. Howard: There is considerable ground for speculation about why the Opposition have adopted such a churlish attitude to proposals which are clearly well designed and will make a significant contribution to further improvement in attitudes to training. I can only hope—I am always an optimist in these matters—that on further, more mature reflection they will yet change their mind.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Secretary of State aware that he has done painfully little to create ladders of opportunity for disabled people because only one in three have jobs? That is a shocking figure. Is he also aware that some of his colleagues have damaged their interests because they talked out a Bill designed to outlaw discrimination against disabled people? Why does not the Minister enforce the employment quota for disabled people? Why does he not impose a levy—not the levy that we were just speaking about, but one similar to the French or German levy—to bring jobs to disabled people? What further action can we have?

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman is well aware that enforcing the quota is simply not practicable since there are not sufficient numbers of registered disabled people to fill the quota. We have reviewed the quota, as we have reviewed the range of ways in which we help disabled people into work, and we have decided to keep the quota under review, but the right hon. Gentleman knows of the difficulties in enforcing it.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): To promote employment in this country, does the Secretary of State's White Paper include policies of 25 per cent. VAT, a 35 per cent. basic rate of income tax, 52 per cent. corporation tax, a 98 per cent. tax on savings or 20 per cent. inflation—or am I right in thinking that no sane Government would introduce such policies honestly in this country? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that that is exactly what was introduced and confirmed in the Budget in April 1975, one year into the last Labour Government?

Mr. Howard: I am extremely interested in my hon. Friend's recollections. It is particularly worthy of note that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer who would have responsibility for these matters if a Labour Government were elected, was a prominent member of the Government at that time.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): What will happen to nurses who have trained at the taxpayers' expense in the national health service but who, increasingly, find themselves unable to get a job after three years' training? What will happen to their pay packets when they end up working in the private sector, often for less money—because we know that the national health service is simply a Bill away from being privatised? Will the Minister tell the nurses honestly whether they will have to pay for their training?

Mr. Howard: There is no question of making nurses pay for their training in those circumstances. How the hon. Lady supposes that the lot of nurses would be improved by the policies of the Labour party is utterly beyond me. Whether nurses would come under the arrangements identified in the White Paper depends entirely on the contractual arrangements that they make with their employers.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I know that my right hon. and learned Friend keeps in close touch with the chairmen of the training and enterprise councils and that he is aware of the concern, particularly in the south of England, about the largesse that occasionally appears to be shown to the north. Will he confirm categorically that TECs will have equal access to the funds that he has made

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available under the White Paper, excellent as it is? Will he ensure that constituencies such as mine and others on the south coast, where employment is a problem and retraining is high on the agenda, have equal access to Government funds without fear or favour and that they have parity with the north of England?

Mr. Howard: The Isle of Wight TEC will certainly have equal access to the competition. We want to encourage excellence in the implementaton of this initiative. There will be a competition, which is the best way forward to ensure that the plans are implemented in the most effective way.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): What distinction does the Minister make between education and training? Many of the people who come under the first proposal would be paying back loans for educational purposes. Can the Secretary of State tell us how many people might be involved in this so-called transfer fee racket, which seems to be difficult to administer? Will he tell us about the relationship between his Department and Scottish Enterprise because, in the defence industry, we need a skills audit, which he could finance? Scottish Enterprise does not have the resources to proceed further with its study of the consequences of the fall in defence expenditure in Scotland.

Mr. Howard: I cannot give an estimate of the numbers involved. It will depend on how many choose to enter the type of contract that I have described.

On the distinction between education and training, we have done a great deal to bring together the best of education and of training. The hon. Gentleman may be interested in one significant and revealing statistic. In 1979-80, 46 per cent. of all 16-year-olds were in education or training. In 1989-90 that figure had gone up to 73 per cent. That shows the progress that we have made in the past 12 years in taking education and training forward.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals, particularly his skilful proposal which deals with poaching. They contrast not only with the bureaucratic levy grant system, which used to exist, but with the Labour party's taxation proposals. Is he aware that my constituents in the retail industry will take careful note of his response to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on the devastating effects that the minimum wage would have on that industry? Will he consult with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security about how the availability for work rule might impede people, particularly the adult unemployed, in obtaining useful training which might enable them to return to work?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support and for his important observations about the retail industry in his constituency. I know that he will lose no opportunity to make it clear to employers and workers in that industry how devastating the prospects for their jobs would be if the Labour party's proposals were put into effect. I do not think that the availability for work rule will impinge on any of the proposals that are identified in the White Paper, but I shall reflect on the point that my hon. Friend made.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Secretary of State please explain how the skills in such industries as glass-making, silver filigree work, carpentry, marquetry and the rest will be perpetuated to the next generation if the very firms in which those skills are needed are going bust due to the policies of the Government?

Mr. Howard: An encouraging aspect of the recession is that, unlike previous recessions, training has not been the first thing to be cut. One survey after another, the latest being the CBI survey, shows that four out of five employers are proposing to maintain or increase their investment in training, despite the present difficulties that they undoubtedly face. So I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take some comfort, as I do, from the figures.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the Select Committee on Employment recently had before it representatives of the Open University who talked about open learning for people losing their jobs? In view of the terrible reception that that got from Opposition Members—even though the Labour party introduced the Open University—may I ask him to say whether the Open University will be used as an adviser to the Department in setting up the excellent open learning policy? How many people does he believe will take advantage of that excellent way of ensuring that people are trained in skills, both when they are unemployed and when they are still in work?

Mr. Howard: I am always interested in the views of the Open University, which has undoubtedly played an important part in taking foward open learning, in which we lead the world. The success of Britain in taking open learning forward is one of our unsung achievements. Indeed, at exhibitions on open learning in almost any part of the world, about 50 per cent. of the stands are from Britain. It is difficult to estimate the numbers of people involved, but I think that it will represent a significant and useful way of increasing the range of options available to unemployed people who wish to reskill themselves.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): If employers fail to enhance the skills and training of the work force, what claim will the work force have against employers for such loss?

Mr. Howard: The thought behind the hon. Gentleman's question is valid. It is of the utmost importance that employers appreciate the significance of training. It is much more important that they do that than anything the Government can do. Employers in this country are investing about £20 billion a year in training. We want to increase that sum and to enhance the quality of the training that they provide. We have put in place a range of measures, including those I have described, to encourage them to do that.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that small firms in particular provide the kind of flexibility that is needed to make the new initiative a great success? Does he further agree that those small firms are a vital part of the rural economy? Will he ensure that the North Yorkshire training and enterprise council, which is an excellent body, is given every opportunity to enhance the rural economy through this imaginative initiative?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of small firms, and I look forward to receiving a bid from the North Yorkshire training and enterprise council to run one of our assessment initiative schemes.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): A jeweller named Ratner had a selling technique for getting rid of rubbish. Unfortunately, the same seems to be happening this afternoon, the Government taking a leaf out of his ideological book in offering absolutely nothing to people who are desperate for jobs and training.

In relation to the transfer levy, what will happen to the thousands of teachers who have been trained at the taxpayers' expense, some of whom teach not in the state sector but in the private sector? Will those teachers, under the right hon. and learned Gentleman's proposals, have to reimburse the taxpayers for that expensive training?

Mr. Howard: They will not have to do so as matters stand. Whether they will have to in future will depend on whether they are prepared to enter into contractual arrangements with the local education authorities.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): May I take the Secretary of State back to the question on nurses asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon)? Does he accept that the national health service is different in the sense that it is owned, managed and run by the Government and a Secretary of State sets in place legislative proposals? Will he give an absolute guarantee that under no circumstances will he enforce the area health authorities in England or health boards in Scotland to introduce such contracts for the training of nurses?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman cannot seriously expect me to give such an undertaking. If necessary, those matters will be considered in the future.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Hexagon Community Ltd. provides a quality training service through the Mersey training and enterprise council. Its funding has been cut and it appears that it has been offered a wind-down contract. In the light of the Secretary of State's comments, what message can I take back to the 35 staff and 205 trainees who will have no jobs or training?

Mr. Howard: I am not sure how that arises on the White Paper. The hon. Gentleman may not have been in the Chamber during Employment questions this afternoon, when the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), was asked about Hexagon and training. He said that he had received a letter from Hexagon and that he would reply to it shortly.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): The Minister has rightly said that employees should have more information about their terms of service. Does he propose to extend the requirements for written particulars of service under the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978? If so, are people to be told precisely what they must repay if, having received training, they decide, for whatever reason, to move? It is no way to improve employees' willingness to undergo training if they are liable to be fined if they move on.

Mr. Howard: Employees' willingness to receive training is not the problem. Employees show a ready desire to take advantage of training opportunities. As to the precise way in which we legislate on the matter, the White Paper makes it clear that we shall consult on that. I look forward to receiving representations from the hon. and learned Gentleman when we do so.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Will the Secretary of State accept that his reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) was complacent in the extreme? If the quotas are not working after 13 years, as the Secretary of State claims, what proposals do the Government have to deal with blatant discrimination against disabled people? Does he realise that, in talking out the Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), the Government are years behind even President Bush? Will he accept that the word "opportunity" will sound hollow to millions of disabled people who are looking for jobs?

Mr. Howard: I do not accept that, because we have gone to considerable lengths to help disabled people into work in a number of ways and under a variety of schemes. In answering the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), I was facing up to the difficulties in terms of enforcing the quota. No one has come up with an obvious and attractive alternative to it. I know that the hon. Gentleman is devoted to the principle of legislation in that area, but I am far from convinced that legislation would have the effect that he genuinely desires.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): The Secretary of State has told the House that he is making provision for employers to claw back some financial recompense in respect of employees who leave before the minimum period has elapsed after their training. What about recompense for major and responsible employers, such as the Royal Mint in Llantrisant in my constituency, who find that firms poach trained people because they cannot afford to train people themselves due to the Government's mismanagement of the economy?

Mr. Howard: I must confess that I find the logic behind the hon. Gentleman's question extremely difficult to follow. Firms are increasingly recognising the importance of investment in training. They are investing in training to an ever-increasing extent. The number of policies that we have put in place is encouraging them to do precisely that.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Is the Secretary of State aware that there is a deputation from GEC Switchgear, Openshaw, Manchester to prevent job losses? What choice or opportunity do those 169 sacked workers have? What opportunity or choice does Mr. Boyle have? He has worked there for 30 years and will get no chance of retraining at his age or financial remuneration of any kind. What does the White Paper mean to them? It is an insult.

Mr. Howard: I understand very well how difficult things will look to those who have recently lost their job, but about 50 per cent. of those who are unfortunate enough to lose their job leave unemployment within three months. The range of measures that we have in place to help unemployed people has helped many, including a 60-year-old I met the other day on Teesside, who had been unemployed for a considerable period and who was helped back into work by one of the schemes that we have recently introduced. There is a range of ways available to help people back to work. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will encourage his constituents to make the most of them.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry that I have not been able to accommodate the three hon. Members who are standing, but I shall certainly bear their claims in mind when we return to the subject on another occasion.

Electoral Reform

4.16 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to reform the law on elections in the United Kingdom; to base the electoral system for such elections on proportional representation; and for connected purposes.

This is one of a series of Bills introduced by my hon. Friends and intended to address a fundamental British malaise. Britain is ill, and it is no wonder: it is because we have a bad constitution. My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) has already proposed a Freedom of Information Bill in this Parliament. Last Friday, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) moved the Home Rule (Scotland) Bill. Tomorrow, my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) will seek leave to bring in a Bill to establish in law a charter of human rights. Today I wish to address the issue of our bankrupt and outdated electoral system.

That list of reforming measures is not exhaustive. Those four measures are critical if we are to reform our political institutions for the modern age and if we are to establish open, near and fair government.

The Bill would reform elections at all levels. At the last European parliamentary elections, it was not so much my party as the Green party, which polled 15 per cent. of the vote with no reward in terms of seats, that was the victim of the distortions of our present electoral system. Those distortions are magnified by the constituency sizes at European parliamentary elections.

The other victim of that distorted electoral system is the European Parliament itself. Its balance and composition, as well as those of its committees, are skewed by the unrepresentative voting system operating in Great Britain. I deliberately exclude Northern Ireland, where a system of proportional representation has ensured representation of the Province's two traditions in the European forum.

The Bill would also apply to local government elections. That may commend itself to Conservative Members—or perhaps they feel that they can justify on good democratic grounds a result such as that in the London borough of Richmond upon Thames, where, in the last elections, a 46 per cent. vote for the Liberal Democrats awarded us with 92 per cent. of the council seats.

Apart from fairness, proportional representation in local government would lead to a far more acceptable or democractically legitimate and accountable restraint on the excessive spending notions of some more extreme council groups than is a centralist power to cap. To be fair, some hon. Members accept that, but the Government have never explained why they are so unwilling to allow the electors, rather than the Secretary of State, to exercise any restraint on erring councils which may be needed.

The Home Rule (Scotland) Bill, debated last Friday, incorporates a system of proportional representation. Indeed, after the experience of the Scotland Act 1978, my right hon. and hon. Friends would be loth to commend any Scottish Parliament without proportional representation. The change of heart by the Labour party on that issue is very much to be welcomed.

So we come to the Westminster Parliament. It is very tempting to dwell on the injustice which the present system deals to my own party—that, at the last election, in return for 23 per cent. of the vote we got 23 seats. But the system throws up other damaging and divisive anomalies too.

Outside Greater London, the hon. Members for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) and for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) are the only Labour Members south of a line drawn from the Severn to the Wash. In spite of the Conservatives polling a cumulative total of 98,340 votes in the cities of Glasgow and Liverpool in 1987, there is not one Conservative Member for either of those great cities.

That kind of imbalance means that, on critical issues affecting those cities or the vast area of southern England, the Government on the one hand and the main Opposition party on the other cannot have the benefit of first-hand knowledge or input in parliamentary debate. That cannot be healthy for a pluralist democracy.

I claim that proportional representation would lead to greater fairness. That in itself is an important factor in any democracy, but experience abroad also suggests that it would lead to better representation of women and of those from our nation's ethnic communities. That could only make the House more representative of the nation as a whole.

Our preferred system of the single transferable vote in multi-member seats with a community identity would change, but nevertheless retain, the link between a Member and his or her constituents. After all, which Member would risk taking too much for granted if the penalty were to lose one's seat to a member of one's own party? That system, too, places more choice in the hands of voters and less in the hands of the constituency executive.

There are clear and encouraging signs that the case for proportional representation is gaining ground. The Labour party has taken some welcome steps in the right direction, but, with a few honourable and wise exceptions, it still balks at taking the final critical step of supporting fair votes for this Chamber.

There have always been some distinguished supporters of proportional representation on the Conservative Benches. Indeed, in 1983, before taking up office, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), writing as the author of a Penguin book, "The Tory Case", said:

> "Conservatives believe in defending our liberties and sustaining efficient government. Electoral reform, as Sir Winston Churchill accepted, provides the best way of doing both these things."

I am sure that the right hon. Member for Bath would do well to remind himself of his own words.

More important, however, the case for a fair voting system is gathering support among those who really count: the voters themselves, those who use the system. Any citizen's charter worth its salt would surely try to enhance the value of the citizen's most valuable possession—his or her vote. But, to no one's surprise, the Prime Minister shies away from that. He may well be able to do so on a Tuesday afternoon at the fag-end of a Parliament, but we shall not lose opportunities in the coming weeks and months to tell the electorate that every Liberal Democrat vote in the coming election will help to put the issue of electoral reform at centre stage on the agenda of the next Parliament.

There is a fundamental reason why it should be there at centre stage. I believe that a reformed electoral system and the reform of government which would inevitably accompany it would bring about the stability and continuity which our country and our economy need. Britain's relative economic decline over the past 40 years is the product of a failed political system which brings uncertainty and breeds conflict.

To those who claim that first-past-the-post produces the certainty that flows from a large majority, I say take but one example. Where has the certainty been in local government finance over the past six or seven years? Those who claim that certainty confuse strong government with headstrong government. A reformed electoral system offers the prospect of genuinely strong government: government with the support of the majority of the people.

4.25 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman seek to oppose?

Mr. Adley: I do.

The House will have listened with interest to the speech by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). It is right that he should have the chance to make such a speech, and I hope that he will allow me, I hope in a moderate and quiet way, to put an alternative view.

At the start of a speech it is normal to declare an interest, and I shall declare mine. At the last election, I received 65·9 per cent. of the votes that were cast in my constituency, as opposed to 41·7 per cent. cast for the hon. Gentleman in the constituency of Orkney and Shetland. It is a matter of statistical record that, at the last general election, the Liberal Alliance averaged only 44·9 per cent. of the vote in their constituencies. Only three of them managed to achieve more than 50 per cent. The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) points. He was not in the House at that time, and shortly he will not be here again.

There is nothing to stop people electing a Liberal, a bush Baptist or whoever they wish. Under our existing system, they may vote for any of those on the ballot paper. People who argue about fairness really mean that some parties are inherently incapable of persuading enough people to vote for them. As far as I know, the Liberal party is the only United Kingdom party which to a man and woman favours eliminating the traditional voting system. The reason for that is clear, and I shall give it, I hope without giving offence: ever since the early years of this century, the Liberal party has been a perpetual loser and it is naturally enthusiastic about changing the rules, rather in the way that the supporters of Aldershot or Accrington Stanley football clubs would like to change the bankruptcy laws.

The usual proposition—we heard it from the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland—is that, if the votes cast were distributed under proportional representation, X, Y and Z would follow. There is no logic on earth which says that, if we change the voting system, the votes will be cast in the same way. That reminds me of a phrase that my late father used to use—if my grandmother had wheels, she would be an omnibus. She had not, and she was not.

This is a serious issue. I am prepared to be persuaded about PR, but many of the arguments are simultaneously seductive and superficial. The proposition is that a system of proportional representation would eliminate extremism. Precisely the opposite is the case. What actually happens is that those who get the fewest votes have the most power. Anyone who looks at Eire and Israel, two

[Mr. Adley]

democracies in which tiny minorities hold the Government and people to ransom, will see that the PR argument is difficult to sustain. Mr. Shamir, as a product of proportional representation, is an example of nothing that I particularly want to follow.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland spoke about proportional representation in Northern Ireland, but he rather gave the game away by making the point that that has only entrenched the polarisation, so that each community has a representative. Instead of the emergence of an "alliance" candidate, who might represent neither of the entrenched parties, PR has merely entrenched the existing situation.

I told the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) that I would mention him in my speech. I do not think that many hon. Members would relish the proposition that, in a so-called hung Parliament, the future size, shape and disposition of the Government would hang in the balance depending in whose favour the hon. Member for Antrim, North decided to bestow his good wishes. The Labour party, the Liberal party and the Conservative party are all, as I understand it, in favour of the Anglo-Irish Agreement; the hon. Member for Antrim, North and his hon. Friends are not.

Are we really to suggest that a hung Parliament, with somebody such as the hon. Member holding the balance of power, is likely to produce a situation which is acceptable to the majority? The way in which that particular person was elected is irrelevant. The proposition is that somebody holds the balance of power and so moderation is ensured. It is far more likely to ensure behind-the-scenes, Tammany hall-type deals which are not in the interest of the majority of people in a democratic society.

The constituency link is paramount. I do not want to see a system whereby party organisations have more power than the people who are elected to do the job. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland mentioned the poll tax, which I have opposed all the way through. It may be that my views on that and on the future of the railways, for example, colour my reason for not wanting the apparatchiks of the Conservative party determining what I do and do not do. I believe that we derive our strength from our election by our constituents, to give that clear, fine definition between constituency and Member of Parliament.

The rock of British democracy is the existing system. It is interesting to me that the Italians, who have long enjoyed, if that is the word, a system of proportional representation, are now seriously considering changing their system because of the constant changes of Government and the instability that many Italian politicians regard as an inherent defect of their system.

If I am wrong, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) will tell me, and I will apologise, but I understand that this morning at a press conference he said that he would vote down the Queen's Speech unless there was a commitment to proportional representation by the party with the most seats in the House. Let us consider that proposition. As far as I know—hon. Members on the Labour Front Bench will tell me; I ask them rather than tell them—neither the Labour party nor the Conservative party is going into the next election with a manifesto commitment to change the voting system to proportional representation. We may well say in both our manifestos that we need to look at it, but there will be no commitment to change it.

So we have a situation where the leader of the Liberal party, with a minority of seats in a hung Parliament and holding the balance, is willing to use that minority position against the votes of the two main parties, neither of which will have offered that proposition to the people of this country. If the right hon. Member for Yeovil would stop and think about the proposal for one moment, he would see that he is not suggesting a fair debate and discussion in the House or among the political parties about the way in which we elect our Parliament: he is offering political blackmail—nothing more, nothing less.

I close my remarks, I hope in a conciliatory way, by saying that I am not opposed to an examination of the system by which we elect our Members of Parliament. What I am opposed to is the arrogant assumption that this country is suffering from what the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland described as "a fundamental malaise". I do not believe—and I have tried to give examples—that there is any necessary correlation between good government and proportional representation or between first-past-the-post and bad government. It needs men and women of good will in politics to try to reach a consensus on individual issues, but to suggest that issuing threats, to be carried out unless those elected with a minority of the votes, in this place or elsewhere, get their own way, is some sort of fair and democratic system is not democratic as I understand the meaning of the word.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 27, Noes 151.

Division No. 76] **[4.33 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beith, A. J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Douglas, Dick
Edwards, Huw
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles
Livingstone, Ken
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Raffan, Keith
Salmond, Alex
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Nicol
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ronnie Fearn and
Mr. David Bellotti.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barron, Kevin
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blunkett, David
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Cash, William
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Cohen, Harry
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey

Dixon, Don
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evennett, David
Farr, Sir John
Foster, Derek
Fox, Sir Marcus
French, Douglas
Gardiner, Sir George
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grist, Ian
Hardy, Peter
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hind, Kenneth
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunter, Andrew
Illsley, Eric
Irvine, Michael
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Madden, Max
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Morgan, Rhodri
Mudd, David
Murphy, Paul
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Redmond, Martin
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rooney, Terence
Rost, Peter
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Tracey, Richard
Trimble, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Turner and
Mr. Conal Gregory.

Question accordingly negatived.

Orders of the Day

Further and Higher Education Bill

[Lords]

Order for Second Reading read.

4.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: In view of the fact that a large number of hon. Members wish to participate in this debate, I propose to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock. It may be possible to relax the limit if hon. Members who speak before 7 o'clock do so briefly.

Mr. Clarke: The Bill is aimed at the expansion of opportunities for education and training after the years of compulsory school attendance. Until recent years, the area of education and training post-16 has been a comparatively neglected part of the political agenda for education, but nowadays the Government are giving it very high priority. We are making such rapid advances that we need this legislation if we are to expand the opportunities significantly, not only for our young people but for adults. Certainly, the generation of young people at present emerging from our schools will need to be better educated and better trained than any previous generation if they are to face up to the demands of modern life. Not only must they expect to be better educated and better trained to cope with the more competitive world than were former generations but throughout their adult lives they will be members of a society in which people accept the need to continue to be trained and educated throughout life.

It is obvious that if people are to face up to this new situation they will have to have access to a wider range of courses and of qualifications than the British system has hitherto usually provided. As we develop that wider range of courses and qualifications we shall need to end some of the stranger traditions of British life. In particular, we shall certainly have to bring to an end snobbish distinctions between academic pursuits and vocational pursuits. We must acknowledge that the area of education and training that has relevance to the world of business and commerce or to a particular vocational pursuit can, if pursued to the same standard as an outstanding and traditional academic career, be awarded the same esteem.

For this new situation we need a much more diverse range of institutions, colleges and universities than we have had hitherto to provide the range of courses that I am describing. In future, when we look at either higher education or further education we shall see a much greater variety of institutions, all providing courses of the same standard, but perhaps in very different climates and with very different styles. We shall certainly still have universities of the "dreaming spires" type, with, I hope, the traditional excellent standards. There will be other universities—equally worthwhile institutions—concentrating on science and technology, whose courses may be rooted in the economic life of their regions, in which they will play a very significant role.

[Mr. Clarke]

In some of our cities there will be giant tertiary colleges for 16 to 19-year-olds. There will also be smaller further education colleges as well as sixth form colleges—some still concentrating, perhaps, on predominantly academic courses rather than on the new vocational qualifications, but some offering the full range—and in rural areas there will be community colleges as well. Thus we shall have much greater participation in higher education and further education, a much wider range of courses and qualifications and a much wider diversity of institutions emerging to serve the needs of society in the 1990s and beyond.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Secretary of State explain what will happen to the traditional sixth forms? How will they fit into the new framework?

Mr. Clarke: The traditional sixth forms will play a valuable part in those schools that have them or acquire them. They will also be a part of the range of institutions from which a person at the age of 16 can choose, with the advice of parents and friends, when deciding what course suits his or her temperament. I expect sixth forms to thrive and to add to the diversity of provision that I have just described.

Of course, we have been moving rapidly in that direction in recent years. We all need to come to terms with the pace of events and with the demands of the next decade or two. I frequently speak of our need to prepare for mass higher education for future generations. We must prepare also for near universal further education, with, I hope, more than 90 per cent. of our young people staying on in the very near future for proper education and training. In addition, as I said, we must make an approach towards a lifetime career that anticipates the need for continuous education and upgrading of training throughout a working life. The Bill will give form to those objectives and help us to expand and develop the right sorts of institutions to meet our needs.

The great challenge of the 1990s in doing all that and in moving into mass participation in higher and further education is that we must move in that direction without lowering academic and professional standards. Wider access must not mean that we lower the standard that is set for our qualifications so that it is easier for everybody to obtain them without having to improve the preparation for them.

More must not mean worse. That is familiar to many of us who remember the argument about the university expansion that was proposed by Lord Robbins and was first planned many years ago. I recall that at first I was sceptical about it. History has shown, however, that expansion—certainly on what now seems the modest scale then anticipated—did not threaten or damage academic standards. We must ensure that the same applies as we expand our universities, what were our polytechnics, our further education colleges and our sixth forms. We must add to the range of courses and the diversity of provision but ensure that standards are not lowered. For example, in my opinion, greater participation in post-16 education should not mean the abolition of A-levels on the basis that not everybody can pass A-levels. Instead it should mean a wider range of choice after 16.

Our degree standard must not be lowered. An honours degree in this country is one of the best regarded academic qualifications in the developed world. Equal status will be given to vocational and academic qualifications, but only where the vocational courses are as demanding and as worthy of esteem as good-quality academic qualifications.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I am anxious to support my right hon. and learned Friend and I am listening to his every word. Will he tell me how I can persuade my constituents, who already have an adult basic education service and a further education service that are as high as, if not higher than, anything that is set out in the Bill, that they should support change that can be only for the worse if there is not some major alteration to the Bill?

Mr. Clarke: At an appropriate stage I shall turn to that issue in some detail. I am anxious to assure my hon. Friend and other of my hon. Friends from Leicestershire, where the community college system is operated—it is operated also in Cambridgeshire and Devon—that the Bill poses no threat to the quality of provision or, necessarily, to its pattern. At present, I am setting the scene for the Bill. I am saying that quality of provision matters just as much as expansion. I am underlining the point that the quality assurance provisions in the Bill, as they apply to both further education and higher education, are just as important as those parts of the Bill that set up the new funding structure and give autonomy to more of the colleges.

I have addressed the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) because it has been put to me frequently as the Bill has proceeded, especially by my hon. Friends who represent constituencies in the three counties which I named. I shall turn in a short while to what I describe as the Maxwell-Hyslop clause. I do so because it was pressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Sir R. Maxwell-Hyslop) and others. I do not believe that the fears expressed by my hon. Friend and others in Devon that the Bill represents a threat to the pattern of provision in rural areas for adult education are justified. We have sought to amend the Bill to meet those fears. I think that it will be more suitable to return to the matter a little later in my speech.

As I said, I am setting the scene for the Bill. I shall delay turning to particular matters so that we do not suddenly go off at a tangent to deal with important but particular points. I think that everything that I have said so far makes it clear that the objective of the Bill is to expand the provision of further and higher education and to expand opportunities for adults, as well as for young people, to engage in all sorts of courses. It is not true that the Bill cuts a line between vocational and leisure courses, any more than it does between the academic and the vocational. It draws no line of a sort that will damage provision. It is —*[Interruption.]* Certainly not. The Labour party is taken up with the campaign about adult education generally. I hope to be able in a few moments to reassure my hon. Friends on the community college argument.

Before moving to the particular——

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: That is the particular in Wolverhampton and even in Richmond. I wish first to deal with the Bill as a whole. I know that particular examples have been raised.

I have described the need for us to legislate to cope with the rapidly changing nature of higher education and further education needs. The specifics that are set out in the Bill—this is so that we can look at the wood before we turn to extremely important trees in particular places—deal first with further education. I hope that even the trees in Wolverhampton will be able to wait for a few minutes.

The main policy set out in the Bill is to give further education colleges, and sixth form colleges in particular, independence from local government. It is designed to give autonomy to the colleges so that they take upon themselves full responsibility for the delivery of courses and the provision of an adequate service to their locality, and to make them accountable more directly to the community that they serve. We propose to move to a funding council system and away from local authority control. That system is based exactly on the experience of the polytechnics over the past few years. At the beginning of this Parliament, shortly after the last general election, the Government carried through a Bill, in the teeth of quite a lot of opposition, that had the effect of taking polytechnics out of local authority control. They have thrived ever since. They have expanded rapidly and their academic independence has not been remotely compromised. On the contrary, they have become powerful academic institutions, making an important contribution to higher education. We are following that precedent in higher education.

When talking in the jargon of the Government's policy, we sometimes refer to creating a new sector of autonomous further education colleges. I hope that within that sector there will be room for considerable diversity. I do not believe that every sixth form college should become like every further education or tertiary college. The co-existence of sixth form colleges in schools, of sixth form colleges previously under schools' regulations and of further education colleges—this is where there is variety, and it is to be found in many areas—means that each student can make a choice on the basis of what suits his or her temperament or aptitude, and what climate, as it were, is likely to be conducive to his or her study.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I accept my right hon. and learned Friend's argument that the Bill is splendid for colleges of further education, which are delighted to have their independence. However, the college of adult education in my constituency is worried lest it has to apply for funds through the college of further education. It may find that that college is unwilling to put its request to the funding council. The adult education college is worried also lest the college of further education should decide to introduce courses that it already makes available, such as literacy courses and English-as-a-second-language courses for the ethnic minorities. It is worried that the college of further education will not put forward its requests.

Mr. Clarke: The argument about access to funding council funds by adult colleges, community colleges and other colleges that do not automatically transfer into the new sector and are funded by the further education funding council is the same as that which has been advanced by hon. Members representing constituencies in Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire and Devon. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman)——

Mr. Jessel *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: —and others—I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) is trying again to intervene, and I shall give way to him shortly. As I said, the same argument is being raised, but it does not fit into my speech at this point. We shall be discussing a guillotine motion later, and I am always accused of making the longest speech. That is because of my customary generosity in giving way to hon. Members on both sides of the House who wish to intervene. I shall give way to all those who ask me to do so, but I should at least be allowed to give way at a logical place in my speech. I have said that I know exactly what they are talking about, and it has nothing to do with what I am talking about now. If they will contain themselves in patience, I shall take up the point in some detail.

I was talking about further education and sixth form colleges having independence from local government, and my hope that there would be some diversity of provision on the part of the autonomous colleges.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will give way if the intervention concerns the point that I just mentioned.

Mr. Flannery: It concerns that point, but, if it had not, I would have moved it on to that point.

The Secretary of State is famous throughout the education community for having launched an all-out and sustained attack on local education authorities, to the point of leaving them very little to do and taking practically everything away. Does he agree that a Government who have attacked local education authorities as the present Government have done—and attacked teachers as they have done, notwithstanding yesterday's bribe—may just possibly be foisting on us something that is in line with their general attack on state education?

Mr. Clarke: Let me say en passant that I have never attacked teachers. The hon. Gentleman's reference to yesterday's pay settlement as a bribe shows that even he cannot see it as a subtle attack on them.

The main point of the Bill's provision for further education and sixth form colleges is to give them independence from local government. The purpose is not to attack local government gratuitously but to enhance the colleges' ability to thrive, expand and broaden their provision. In my opinion, local authority control is not the best way in which to bring that about. The same arguments were used in regard to polytechnics, but their history shows that they positively thrived once they were taken away from local authority control.

I see that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is becoming distressed at this point. Labour has approached the Bill with an automatic attachment to local government control of everything. Labour Members are so firmly tied hand and foot to Labour councillors up and down the country that they cannot concede that further education and sixth form colleges might do better to take the next logical step, from local management to total autonomy—being allowed to run their own affairs.

[Mr. Clarke]

The colleges do not regard our proposals as an attack. The hon. Member for Blackburn, who follows these matters, may well have seen a poll of principals that was conducted by what was *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*—it is now called "The Higher". I do not always rely on polls, but this poll showed that two thirds of principals agreed with the policy of granting independence——

Mr. Flannery: Of course they do—you bribed them.

Mr. Clarke: Of course they do, because in their opinion it is in the interests of the colleges, and of their ability to secure the best possible provision of local services. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Blackburn is now trying to join in.

Labour's policy is becoming a most curious hybrid. I understand that Labour Members have been a bit worried about being currently opposed to the colleges doing nothing but remaining under local government control; they therefore offered them corporate status. That is a frightfully important step, because colleges can have the corporate status while remaining under local authority control when it comes to such matters as planning and money. It is not surprising that, according to "The Higher", that rather curious hybrid policy received the support of more than 20 per cent. of principals. That 20 per cent. consists of the nervous ones. They need only talk to the director of a polytechnic, or a polytechnic lecturer, to find that no one in the polytechnic world wants to return to local authority control—not even some staunch supporters of the Labour party.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): If the Secretary of State is so confident of public support for the proposal to take centalised control of further education away from local communities, why has he refused to publish responses to the Bill, not from individuals but from institutions and governing bodies? Why has he departed from the practice accepted by his predecessor, who published responses to the Education Reform Bill 1988 and made them available to hon. Members? Is not the truth that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has refused to publish the responses to this Bill because, overwhelmingly, they show opposition to its proposals?

Mr. Clarke: First, to describe the aim of the proposals as "centralised control" is utterly daft. The polytechnics are not under centralised control; quite the reverse. They were taken away from local authority control and given their autonomy—given complete academic independence. That point was mentioned in the other place, and I shall return to it later.

A funding council distributes money at arm's length from Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "The Government dictate."] They certainly do not dictate. It was made clear in another place that there was no prospect of any Secretary of State seeking to dictate to the funding council. The funding council is very much at arm's length. The idea that any polytechnic principal feels that he is being dictated to by the Government, and that he is under centralised control, is frankly ridiculous. Labour Members know that, and they should not make a belated attempt to stir principals into resistance by claiming otherwise.

Mr. Turner: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: As Wolverhampton seems to be relevant to every point, I will.

Mr. Turner: The Secretary of State has just made an important point about the attitude of the principals. Is it any wonder that they should feel cynical and concerned about the Secretary of State's attitude? Their cynicism and concern should not be underestimated.

In the next financial year, which will usher in all these marvellous developments, the college principals face massive reductions in their budgets. Those reductions mean that they cannot respond to the needs of their colleges, even in the next 12 months. How can the Secretary of State expect them to believe what he is saying? A college in my constituency faces a cut of half a million pounds in the next financial year. Why does not the Secretary of State show good faith, and give colleges the resources that they need?

Mr. Clarke: If the college in Wolverhampton is taking a cut in its budget, it is taking that cut from a borough council whose education budget the Government have increased in real terms. I have no doubt that cuts imposed on that college will make the principals even more eager to escape from the vagaries of local government control, and to put to the funding councils their case for money with which to maintain and expand their services.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend would like to examine the way in which Lancashire county council is funding Skelmersdale college. It is providing the college with only 85 per cent. of the amount that the Department has calculated to be necessary. The college looks forward to receiving an additional 15 per cent., and to expanding the facilities that it offers students, following the passage of the Bill.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I anticipate that the Bill may provoke a flood of complaints from further education colleges about their local education authorities—just as, five years ago, there could have been a flood of complaints from polytechnic directors about their authorities. In the Bill, we are moving towards independence.

Mention of the polytechnics takes me on to the subject of higher education. I hesitate to say this, but I think that this part of the Bill may be less controversial. It abolishes the distinction between polytechnics and universities, which I am satisfied has become entirely outdated. In any other country in the developed world, the institutions that we call polytechnics would be described as universities. In both north America and Western Europe they would take their place alongside many other distinguished higher education institutions.

The division between the two may or may not have been necessary when the polytechnics were first set up, but it now seems to hark back to distinctions between academic institutions and those tied more closely to industry and commerce that we do not wish to perpetuate. The academic standards in our polytechnics are certainly worthy of any university, and it is simply not true to say that they are in any way inferior institutions. We need to introduce a funding mechanism that will be common to both types of institution, and to encourage cost-effective expansion where it is most needed. We need to give access to funds for teaching and research on equal terms to the institutions hitherto described as universities and polytechnics, and we need to accept that the rich diversity in our higher education provision will be best recognised —both abroad and by students here—if we call all such institutions universities.

The biggest practical effect of our retaining the title "polytechnic" for so long has been, to a certain extent, a marketing effect, but a very important one. That has tended to discourage students from applying to polytechnics because they wrongly perceive that a polytechnic place is not quite as good as a university place. However, they might have been applying to a polytechnic department with a much superior academic reputation to that of a similar department in a university. Polytechnics have encountered serious difficulties with their international relations. Because nobody understands our "polytechnic" designation, the polytechnics have had to explain what it means.

As I said in my preliminary remarks, the right way to regard the higher education world is to stop making that distinction between universities and polytechnics, and to allow each of them the same access to funds and the ability to compete equally for funds for teaching and research on the basis of quality. I hope that those provisions receive widespread support.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I give way to my hon. Friend. For as long as I have been a Member, he has followed higher education matters. He urged his case strongly upon me in a conversation that we had within two days of my taking office.

Dr. Hampson: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that tribute and thank him for what he is doing in the Bill. However, does he recognise the phenomenal growth in both the polytechnics and the universities—but especially in the polytechnics—during the past three or four years? As he recognised the other day the hard work and extra effort of school teachers, will he also recognise the huge pressure on higher education staff? If he is concerned about equality of treatment, will he reconsider the position of university staff, including the new university staff, and establish a pay review body for them along the lines of that which he has already sensibly granted to school teachers?

Mr. Clarke: I pay tribute to everything that has been achieved in the polytechnics in recent years and to the contribution by the staff to their cost-effective expansion and their reduction in unit costs. However, as my hon. Friend knows, I shall not go on from that to say that we should have a review body for polytechnic or university lecturers. Review body status is given to particular groups or professions in the public service. As it is not strictly relevant to the Bill, I shall give only one reason for not extending review body status to higher education. Higher education institutions do not receive all their funds from the Government, so to continue to move the review body boundaries forward would be to give review body status to groups of employees who are not paid solely out of public funds. A high proportion of higher education institutions' funds come from outside. Therefore, although I pay tribute to higher education staff, I do not couple that with granting review body status, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) wishes.

I hope that ending the distinction between universities and polytechnics will not end the diversity of provision. We do not want to see an end to the distinctive mission of those universities that concentrate on, say, applied research rather than on basic research, and that have extremely close links with industry and many part-time as well as full-time students. Such institutions may also have a higher proportion of mature students and may have developed a wide range of courses. I hope that ending the distinction will mean that the whole of our higher education system will give proper regard to applied research, not just to basic research. I hope that the whole may be stimulated to develop closer links with industry and that different institutions will retain their individual ethos and, to use the Americanism, their "mission" in continuing to make their contribution to the system.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Surely the Secretary of State is not confusing parity of esteem with name changes. Is not his description of what happens in north America and western Europe a travesty of the truth? In those countries, universities-in-all-but-name proudly defend their right not to have the word "university" in their title precisely because they have parity of esteem although they may be called institutes of technology, or Technische Hochschulen in Germany. Those institutions have what might be called "equal snob value" with universities and they would shoot someone rather than be forced to change their title to "university". Is not one of the things wrong with this country in general the fact that, for marketing reasons, an institution can decide that it would be better to be called a university rather than an institute of technology or a polytechnic? That does not happen in other countries, such as Germany or the United States of America.

The Secretary of State went on to say that such institutions could nevertheless continue their distinctive mission of providing applied science as opposed to pure academic research and science, but he must know that that is precisely what does not happen. Once an institute of technology has been allowed to change itself into a university, it tries to cover exactly the same ground as a university and moves from the applied to the pure and theoretical because that is what this country, unfortunately, with its traditions of snob values, does extremely well, but that has nothing to do with earning our living in the world outside.

Mr. Clarke: I have considerable sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's first point and agree that nobody could persuade the Massachusetts institute of technology to change its name to "university". Indeed, MIT probably regards itself as having a higher status than Boston university over the way—MIT is a particularly internationally famous higher education institution——

Mr. Morgan: What about French and German polytechnics?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that French polytechnics enjoy particularly high esteem.

The points that I have made about marketing were put to me by polytechnic directors. To a certain extent, they reflect what is wrong. As I said at the start of my speech, that is something from which we must move away.

However, we are not talking only about a change of title, although that change of title will help to overcome the

[Mr. Clarke]

inert prejudices of parts of British society, albeit by conceding to them. We are also getting rid of the distinct funding arrangements. We are opening up access to research funds on an equal basis to all universities or polytechnics—whatever they call themselves—as long as they get recognition of their status. We are not forcing them to change title, but most will feel attracted to doing so. We are talking about more than a symbolic change —we are talking about amalgamating them.

However, I do not agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) that it is likely that the polytechnics will instantly try to imitate the more traditional universities—although that was true many years ago when the colleges of advanced technology became universities. I acknowledge that that happened in some cases, but the climate of opinion has now changed. Not only have the directors of the polytechnics assured me that they have no intention of doing any such thing, but they have done so in a wholly credible fashion. The polytechnic sector is now the most successful in terms of expansion. It has been forceful and self-confident in the past few years.

If the hon. Member for Cardiff, West is still concerned, I advise him that we shall expect the funding council to have regard to different institutions' distinctive missions when allocating funds. The funding council is perfectly entitled to take the view that it does not want an institution pointlessly to try to change its mission. We do not want everything to be set in aspic. However, I do not believe that in 1992 the risks are as the hon. Gentleman described them.

The Bill also deals——

Mr. Jessel *rose*——

Hon. Members: Ah.

Mr. Clarke: I am nearing the point at which I shall invite my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham to intervene because, having dealt with further and higher education, I am about to turn to adult education——

Mr. Jessel *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: Before I give way, the first point that I wish to make about adult education is that the Bill makes no change whatsoever to the long-existing policy that has been adopted towards all types of adult education in this country. It represents no threat to the pattern of expansion in adult education that we have seen in the past 10 years. Vigorous campaigns have been run recently, not only by the local authority associations—as one might expect—but in association with the Women's Institute and the Workers Educational Association—which I found more surprising—suggesting that the reforms posed a threat and would change adult non-vocational education. That is not true—

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North) *rose*——

Mr. Jessel *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way first, but in a moment, to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond.

A local education authority's duty will encompass all types of further education outside the scope of the duty of the further education funding council. That means that there will be no diminution of the statutory duty to provide any kind of further education, including adult education. It is true that certain types of adult education will remain within the remit of the local education authorities. The LEAs will continue to receive public funds to enable them to carry out their continuing duty to provide those less formal adult courses. The funds that they have always received will continue to be made available. We are carrying out a survey of local authority spending in the year 1989-90 as the basis for deciding the division of funds between the funding council and the LEAs in the future.

The pattern of adult education will continue as before. As now, it will be for local authorities to decide to what extent they will subsidise the fees or provide a range of courses. That remains a local authority problem. Their source of funding will not change. Their funding position will not change. Their legal powers will not change. The argument that courses will end or fees will rise as a direct result of the reforms in the Bill is totally fallacious.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: The level of fees and provision of courses will depend on local authority provision. Of course, some adult colleges and other colleges want to know where they will fit in in all this.

Mr. Jessel: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham, to whom I have mistakenly referred as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond—I apologise—wishes to intervene on that point.

Mr. Jessel: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that this morning my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) and I saw the Minister of State about Richmond upon Thames adult college? We put to him our united view that the excellent range of courses attended by 25,000 people at that college must be securely protected and upheld. Will either my right hon. and learned Friend or my hon. Friend the Minister of State in his reply spell out exactly how that is to be done?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friends the Members for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) and for Twickenham have been pursuing all Ministers about that matter for a considerable time. I was delighted to hear that my hon. Friend the Minister of State had a meeting with them and covered the necessary ground—the basis on which Richmond college might, first, decide whether it wishes to seek designation under clause 16 to come within the remit of the further education funding council or, secondly, have a look at clause 6 under which it might obtain funds indirectly from the funding council. The position of the college in Richmond is best left to my hon. Friend in his reply as he spent a considerable time this morning—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Well, the colleges are all rather different. I will happily deal with the college—I expect to do so—in other contexts.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: On Richmond?

Mr. Fatchett: Yes.

Mr. Clarke: Really? The hon. Gentleman is looking for a new constituency. I did not realise it. On Richmond, I will give way.

Mr. Fatchett: I did not realise that the Secretary of State was so concerned about my future. I will stay with Leeds, Central for the moment. Perhaps the Secretary of State will be in a position to give some more information to his hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). A letter which has been drawn to my attention from the Minister of State to the hon. Member for Twickenham, dated 22 January, says:

> "I have to say that Ministers are not sure whether it"—

that is the college—

> "will be best placed within the new independent further education sector or in the continuing LEA sector."

It seems that a month later Ministers still have no reassurance for the people of Richmond and its college, which is attended by 25,000 people. The Secretary of State can provide further information. The letter goes on to say:

> "One should remember that the Councils will ordinarily fund colleges only for provision that falls within their own remit"—

that is the remit of the further education funding council.

Earlier the Secretary of State tried to suggest to some of his other hon. Friends that the further education funding council would be able to cover non-vocational adult education. Will he also look at schedule 2——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. This is taking unfair advantage of an intervention. Will the hon. Gentleman make his point to the Secretary of State so that he may respond?

Mr. Fatchett: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I simply wish to say that under schedule 2 to the Secretary of State's Bill, to which he did not refer earlier, the courses provided by Richmond would not be funded directly by the further education funding council; so he needs to tell his hon. Friends what will be the position of Richmond college. It is an extremely popular college and it is clear that the Minister of State has no idea what will happen to it.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman has not followed the point or caught up with the Minister of State's letter, which is in no way inconsistent with what I have just said. The position is——

Mr. Fatchett: What about Richmond?

Mr. Clarke: This is relevant to Richmond, to the college in Lancaster which troubles my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and to the community colleges in Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire and Devon. I name those three counties but they are not the only examples of colleges that offer their type of provision. However, as far as I am aware, they are the only ones with widespread provision of that type in rural areas.

The first question is whether the college comes within that category of colleges that will transfer to the further education funding council. When I replied to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham a moment ago, I referred to clause 16 which determines whether further education institutions which do not automatically qualify should be incorporated. *[Interruption.]* It is no good the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) waving the letter about. He has not understood it. The fact is that in the first instance the college must decide whether it wishes to be incorporated. It is no good descending from Leeds into Richmond and getting the provisions of the Bill and various letters around the hon. Gentleman's neck.

As Richmond college will not be automatically incorporated, the first step is for it to decide whether it wishes to seek incorporation under clause 16. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has touched on that matter in conversations with my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham and, as the letter is his, he should be left to reply to the point later, if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The first step is for the college to form a view about whether it is in its interest to become incorporated under clause 16. If it is not incorporated, the next step is to look for access to funding council funds under clause 6. In clause 6(5) provision is made for an institution that is under the control of not the funding council but the local authority to seek funding council money for courses provided within the terms of schedule 2. As the hon. Member for Leeds, Central correctly said, schedule 2 sets out the range of courses for which the funding council is responsible.

Mr. Austin Mitchell *rose*——

Mr. Harry Greenway *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I will not give way. I must deal with this point.

Clause 6(5) is the one to which I have already referred as the Maxwell-Hyslop clause because the Devonians have made representations for some time on the matter. The clause sets out the procedure whereby, in the case of Devon, the community college would make a request to its further education college for funding for its pattern of provision.

Mr. Turner: It is a nightmare.

Mr. Clarke: It is not a nightmare. It is perfectly straightforward to everyone except those who have dreams of putting everything back into local authority control by producing typical barrack-room lawyer points. The college will apply to the further education funding council under clause 6(5) and I anticipate that in all such cases the council will act as a conduit for the moneys for provision in rural areas of the counties, as is provided at present.

If, for some reason, the further education college did not meet the application, the provision would not be adequate, as clause 6 stipulates that it must be. The community college—to take that example—would then go directly to the funding council under clause 3(2) and ask it to consider the college's application direct to make sure that the council could discharge its duty. If the funding council failed to do so, eventually the college could come to me. However, I do not believe that that is remotely likely.

Mr. Austin Mitchell *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I will spell it out to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central, who is sitting there muddling his way through the Bill, so that he may have the opportunity of sorting it out by later tonight. All that the schedule means is that if a college decides not to become incorporated under clause 16 it must find some other route to seek funds. It will go first to the FE college. If, for some unexpected reason, the FE college will not arrange for the

[Mr. Clarke]

money to be transmitted, the college will go direct to the funding council and complain on the basis that the service is inadequate.

Mr. Fatchett: It is so complicated.

Mr. Clarke: It is not complicated. If the Opposition are deliberately misreading rather than accidentally misunderstanding, their motives are merely to suggest that local authority bureaucracy is preferable and would make the best provision in Leeds, Wolverhampton, Grimsby and elsewhere.

Mr. Fatchett: The Secretary of State has clearly come up with a simple system which he had no difficulty explaining to us. He put forward two hypotheses. One is that the FE college turns down the proposal. The other is that the proposal is made to the further education funding council. The FEFC could also turn down the proposal. The Secretary of State needs to tell the House and his hon. Friends that under clause 10—*[Interruption.]* I will pass the Bill across to the Secretary of State if he wants—the local authority could be asked to meet the funding. However, it must be stated clearly that the local authority is under no duty to provide the resources. Will the Secretary of State confirm that I am right about that?

Mr. Clarke: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman. Every time that I try to explain, he puts up a barrage of barracking in the hope that he can make the Bill appear more complicated than it is. He is getting there slowly.

First, the community college applies to the further education colleges. In the vast majority of cases, further education colleges will arrange for funds in a straightforward way. It is fanciful that suddenly people will decide to upset long-standing and successful arrangements in such places as Leicestershire and Devon.

If a further education college, for some expansionist reasons of its own, should refuse—should there be a malevolent further education college—the community college could tell the further education funding council that the system was not working properly and that adequate provision was not being made. The first situation to be faced is that the funding council is entitled to say no. There is no automatic right to public funds, even from Wolverhampton council under the present arrangements, let alone from anywhere else. However, access to the funding council—which supposedly troubles everyone—is indeed secured under clause 3(2) of the Bill. It is true that the local authority may have the power to provide, but it will not have the specific funds to do so.

If everyone is behaving perversely, which is extremely unlikely, the college may approach the Secretary of State under clause 57(3), who may issue a direction. Their lordships did not strip me of powers of direction for further education colleges; so, in suitable circumstances, I can do that. This is piling up complications. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central fondly imagines that——

Mr. Straw: It is complicated.

Mr. Clarke: It is not. It is a straightforward Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, it is perfectly straightforward. The Opposition began by not reading the Bill properly and they clearly misunderstood the letters. I take their reaction as a spirited but unsuccessful attempt to sustain local authority power over all further education, because they appear incapable of understanding the Bill.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: We have dealt with that point. No doubt we shall return to it, but I shall not return to it straightaway.

Mr. Harry Greenway *rose*——

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall not give way. I am in serious danger of taking too long. By the time that we get to the guillotine motion, that will be the source of indignant complaint.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madame Deputy Speaker: Order. Do I understand that the Secretary of State is not giving way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall not give way for some time, neither to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) nor to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell).

Despite constant attempts to seek clarification on points of policy, I have succeeded in covering the policy on higher and further education and dealing, first, with the nonsense campaigns on adult education and, secondly, with serious matters raised by my hon. Friends—*[Interruption.]* The nonsense campaign was the campaign by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. I have also tried to deal with the serious issues mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham and for Tiverton and elsewhere who have been given a serious reply and an amendment to the Bill to meet their point.

Sir John Farr *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: In discussing underlying policy we need——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I shall not give way.

Madame Deputy Speaker: Order, I heard the Secretary of State say that he would not give way. Someone as thick-skinned as I am understands that the Secretary of State is not giving way. He means what he says.

Mr. Clarke: I have given way a number of times. I know that I am noted for my accommodating ways and my propensity to listen, but I think that we should press on with the Bill.

The background to the policy which I have outlined of expanding higher and further education and making no policy changes for adult education—indeed, we are paving the way for further expansions there—is that participation has already increased dramatically. We should remember the background of successful policies during the past 10 years because that explains why we require this legislation to accommodate the change. For example, in further education, 75 per cent. of 16-year-olds participated in full-time education or youth training schemes in 1989-90, compared with 46 per cent. when we came into office in 1979-80. In 1989-90, 58 per cent. of 17-year-olds participated in full-time education or youth training schemes, compared with 29 per cent. in 1979-80. Including part-time provision, 86 per cent. of 16-year-olds participated in full-time education or youth training schemes in 1989-90. The figure of 86 per cent. participating in full-time education or youth training rises to more than 90 per cent. if private further education provision is included.

In this country we go in for self-flagellation about our performance compared with that of western European countries, usually completely failing to compare like with like and wishing upon astonished western Europeans a perfection of provision which they do not recognise in their towns and villages or in their institutions and factories.

More than 90 per cent. of our 16-year-olds participated in full-time education or youth training schemes in 1989-90. There are almost 50 per cent. more students in further education now than there were in 1979-80. That trend is certainly expected to continue and current forecasts are correct to indicate that there will be another 50 per cent. increase between 1990 and the year 2000.

Education for adults has just been the subject of an entertaining barrack-room lawyer wrangle, but it is an important and serious subject because more and more adults want to take part in courses of all kinds. During the past decade there has been a 27 per cent. increase in the number of adult enrolments, which means those of 19 or over, in all types of further education. More than 50 per cent. of those enrolments are in further education colleges, compared with under 40 per cent. in 1980.

Our record in higher education is better known—it is one of the most spectacular changes of the Conservative decade of the 1980s. Only one in eight of our young people participated in higher education in 1979. Now it is one in four, and it will plainly be one in three by the end of the decade.

On funding to back up that policy, there has been a real terms increase of more than 20 per cent. for further education in the past decade, and spending on further and adult education centres increased from about £610 million in 1979-80 to an estimated £1·707 billion in 1991-92. That more than 20 per cent. increase excludes spending on work-related further education, which is financed by the Department of Employment, and on higher education in local education authority colleges. Funding for higher education was up by more than 10 per cent. in each of the past three public expenditure settlements. That is a huge investment in successful expansion.

The Government have embarked upon that investment because in our judgment it is good supply side economics. It will improve this country's economic performance if we invest such public resources in the steady expansion of further and higher education. Obviously it is right that we should insist on cost-effective use of that money, and cost-effective expansions would do so.

The Bill will pave the way for further expansion of higher education and further education of all kinds, and will not lead to any contraction. I shall leave the detailed provisions of the Bill, which we shall no doubt discuss in the lengthy Committee stage for which our guillotine makes provision.

The Bill makes one important point which is not politically controversial—it makes important provision for educating people with disabilities. The Government's policy is that disability should not be a bar to access to further or higher education. The Bill is designed to maintain that position and has been strengthened in another place by amendments on that subject which the Government accepted—they were not forced upon us.

Students with learning difficulties will be able to benefit from the range of opportunities which will be available in the new further education sector. The Bill strengthens existing substantial duties to provide for that group of students and provides a suitable framework within which provision for them can be maintained and developed.

Specifically, the Government have imposed an additional duty on the funding councils over the use of placements for students with learning difficulties, up to the age of 25, in specialist independent colleges. We have also added to the responsibilities of the funding councils in relation to courses for those students in independent living and communication skills.

I have underlined the non-controversial point and that brings the House back to a calm appreciation of the importance of our legislating sensibly for higher and further education to provide for the expansion that we all want to see.

I should mention the Lords amendments which were carried against the wishes of the Government and upon which we have reflected carefully. The Bishop of Guildford, with the support of a number of my noble Friends and other noble Members of the other place, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, tabled a provision relating to religious education and acts of collective worship in sixth form colleges. That is a difficult matter. The amendment established provision to match the existing legal duties on sixth form colleges—in fact, it eases them slightly. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I note what my hon. Friends say; indeed, the Government have decided that they will not attempt to reverse their lordships' decision. I learnt with particular astonishment that the amendment was supported by those on the Labour Front Bench in another place.

Another lengthy debate in another place concerned academic independence and the supposed significance of clauses that gave condition-making powers on grants and direction-making powers to the Secretary of State regarding the higher education funding council.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I know that the hon. Gentleman follows matters relating to higher education and research closely and, if he will allow me to continue, I am sure that I shall address the point that he intends to raise.

There was an extremely animated debate in the other place about academic freedom. I know that a number of my hon. Friends would be anxious to sustain it here were that issue to be reopened. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) has already mentioned this matter to me, and he is by no means the only one.

I still do not believe that the Bill, as originally drafted, posed any threat to academic freedom. The clauses upon which the debate centred were technical ones designed to clarify powers that had already been given to the Government by Parliament in 1988. Nevertheless, visions were raised of future Secretaries of State, whether right wing or left wing, seeking to hire and fire lecturers, bar individual students, close courses and undertake a number of other things which, in my opinion, were never remotely raised as possibilities in the Bill.

[Mr. Clarke]

Certain matters arise when the Secretary of State must account to Parliament for the use of public moneys when, occasionally, he must seek to ensure that even a funding council uses such moneys for the purpose for which Parliament intended. The Secretary of State has to account for those moneys.

There are occasions—I do not claim that it is so in this case with my noble Friends—when academic freedom is discussed, as clinical freedom is sometimes discussed, as a subterfuge for people saying, "Do give us the money and stop asking what has gone on and how we have accounted for it." However, after a prolonged debate, the Government were defeated on that matter. I have considered the amendments and I am perfectly disposed to accept them, and I trust that they will prove adequate to allow a Secretary of State of this or any other Government to account to the House.

The hon. Member for Blackburn is entitled to enjoy the sight of the Government being defeated in another place. However, in the highly unlikely and undesirable case of the hon. Gentleman ever becoming Secretary of State for Education and Science, I am confident that he would table exactly the same clause as I did. I am sure that he would be distinctly annoyed to find that powers of accounting for public money were hacked away on the grounds of academic independence.

In this case, the Government will accept the judgment of their lordships and we will not seek to reverse their decision.

Mr. Dalyell: What can the right hon. and learned Gentleman say to Court of Appeal judges such as Lord Simon of Glaisdale, who expressed concern about the use of the affirmative resolution procedure in relation to clause 77? Please forgive me for intruding as a Scot who is immersed in the Scotland Bill, but I believe that issue is of concern to all of us.

Mr. Clarke: I have the highest regard for Lord Simon of Glaisdale, who has had a highly distinguished legal career and who is certainly a better lawyer than I am. However, his opinion about the application of the law to universities in relation to the Bill was not always beyond controversy. Nevertheless, I would not argue with his opinion.

Lord Simon played an influential part in the debates that led their lordships to believe that it was necessary to amend the Bill. Their lordships now accept the Bill as it stands and the Government, upon reflection, have also decided to do so. We have not recommended any changes to the House. There the matter rests, but with the greatest respect to all those concerned, I believe that those who were anxious about academic freedom have carried the day rather more than they needed to; hence the Bill now appears in its present form.

Sooner or later the House will start to demand of the Secretary of State that he should account for some extraordinary use of public money. However, he will have to turn around and say that those powert were taken from him as a result of amendments to the Bill in another place. Let us hope that the present outcome is satisfactory. Certainly the Government would resist going any further.

The Bill, as it now stands, will enable us to continue the rapid advance in the expansion of opportunities, range of courses and provision for young people and for adults. It will result in more and better education for 16 to 18-year-olds and for adults. It will lead to greater choice as colleges become more responsive to local demand. It will provide a better deal for students with learning difficulties. It will also provide for greater choice in higher education.

I commend the Bill to the House.

5.45 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): It is a rare pleasure to be able to welcome part of a Bill introduced by the Government. I welcome unreservedly that part of it which contains the policy for which the Labour party has argued for many years—the creation of a single funding council to take over the work of the existing Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) was Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on higher education he moved amendments in the Committee considering the Education Reform Bill to rid us of the binary divide in higher education. He said that we should get rid of the binary divide and set up one funding body. I am sorry to say that those amendments for the establishment of a single funding body for higher education were resisted by the Government. The then Parliamentary Under-Secretary responsible for higher education, the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), said that there were not only practical but philosophical objections to ending the binary divide because there was,

> "a differentiation of mission between the two sectors of higher education"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee J,* 24 March 1988; c. 1492.]

In the past four years, the philosophical objections to that change have been shown to be the nonsense that they always were, while the practical case for ending that binary divide has become so overwhelming that even the Government have been forced to acknowledge it.

Dr. Hampson: It is not fair for the hon. Gentleman to make such a petty party point when the philosophical distinction was created by a Labour Government through Tony Crosland and then perpetuated and argued in favour of throughout the 1970s by the then Minister of State for Education and Science, Mr. Gerry Fowler. We all have that in common. Frankly, the hon. Gentleman should welcome the fact that we now have a consensus about degree-awarding status and the change of title. Given that the preparatory work has reached such a stage in the polytechnics, will the hon. Gentleman guarantee that he will cause no further delay to the Bill so that we can get it through before the general election?

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that I have been inconsistent, let me take him back 25 years to the statements I made against the proposals of Mr. Anthony Crosland to create a binary divide, as enunciated in his Woolwich speech of January 1967. I happened to think that he was wrong, even though he was a member of my party. I have remained of that opinion.

I was not seeking to make a petty point. I only wish that, sometimes, Ministers and their colleagues would listen to the force of our argument. This is not a partisan, party political issue, but the case for ending the binary divide was as strong four years ago as it is today. A good deal was lost by not ending the divide then.

We welcome a sinner who repents and we welcome this late conversion unreservedly. The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) asked me what co-operation we intend to give for the passage of the Bill. If all that the Bill contained related to our policy in respect of higher education, for which there is widespread consensus, it would have had an unopposed Second Reading and it could have become law already. Sadly, that is not the case.

I shall deal later with the inadequacy of the Bill to ensure academic standards and the protection of academic freedom, but first I must comment on the issue of names, a subject to which I hope the Secretary of State will give further thought. I have considered carefully the right hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks about university titles for those remaining colleges of higher education which are not polytechnics. I have noted his remarks about, in his view, the inappropriateness of using the term "university college" because he thinks that it will be confused, for example, with university colleges in Wales and other constituent parts of existing universities.

I ask him to think again and particularly to take account of the precedent of the old university college of North Staffordshire, now Keele university, because that was a very small institution which was just a collection of Nissen huts. It was not called a university college for 10 or 15 years before becoming a university, and there has been no confusion about its nomenclature and those constituent colleges of the university of Wales. Indeed, the name itself helped the establishment of that institution. There will be a problem if there are to be a few colleges—Edgehill college of higher education, Nene college in Northampton and others—which, in a sense, from the name point of view, are wholly separate from the rest of the university sector.

A sad aspect of the Bill is the fact that, although in higher education the Government are ending one binary divide, which is welcome, they are creating two others in further and adult education. Further education is to be riven by a bureaucratic split between locally funded school-based sixth forms and centrally controlled further education and sixth form colleges. Adult education is to be pulled asunder by an artificial, irrational divide between work-related and so-called leisure courses.

At the end of the debate in another place, my noble Friend Baroness Blackstone said that no good educational arguments had been put forward throughout the extensive debates in that House as to why further education should be taken out of local authority control. I have read virtually every page of the *Official Report* of the debates in the other place, and Baroness Blackstone was absolutely right, for no such arguments exist.

The Government's proposals for further and adult education lack popular support. The Government have no mandate for them. It is no good the Secretary of State —as he tried to do in his speech—claiming in support the further education principals, because there are other people with interests in further education colleges apart from the principals.

I am a governor of a large college of further education, a tertiary college, Blackburn college. That college, like every other, has a majority of governors representing business interests. Only 20 per cent. of the representatives are from the local education authority. The Secretary of State will know, because he has received a letter to the effect, that there was a welcome for corporate status. With one reservation, we also welcomed it, as I have made clear. We are not dismissing the Bill simply because we did not invent it. There was a high degree of scepticism in that governing body over the fact that financing from Preston, which is democratically accountable, will be replaced by an unaccountable regional advisory body and by control from Whitehall.

The Secretary of State, who is supposed to believe in open government—we now have the citizens charter—has treated the House and those interested in the subject with great contempt in not publishing the responses that he has received to the Bill. I do not understand why he has refused to do that. The Home Secretary did it with responses, not from individuals but from institutions, concerned with the Education Reform Act 1988, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman should have done the same with this measure.

Mr. Flannery: Frit.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is correct; he is usually correct in his observations.

Further education colleges are among the great unsung successes of the English education system. They are all local in character, serving local needs. Local people without exception have established, maintained and expanded those colleges. They have often been local councillors, articulating and meeting the wishes of their electors.

Four years ago, the contribution of local authorities was recognised even by Ministers. The then Minister of State, now a Minister at the Home Office, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), said in commending section 120 of the Education Reform Act, which gave local authorities new powers in respect of further education, that she had great confidence that local authorities would fulfil their duty to promote further education, and she commended the previous record of LEAs, as had many Conservative Members.

She was right to pay that tribute because for, more than 13 years, the LEAs and further education colleges under them, and sixth form colleges, had operated in a vacuum. There had been no national policy for further education. Indeed, further education had grown and developed despite, rather than because of, the Government. The Secretary of State came close to admitting that in his opening remarks when he said that further education had been comparatively neglected.

The shift to tertiary education—to sixth form colleges —in place of unviable sixth forms, has been of great importance in increasing participation rates and opportunities in many areas, as has happened in my constituency, and that shift has occurred as a result of local initiatives rather than as a result of national policy.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It may be a small point, but the hon. Gentleman has a mannerism of constantly slightly misquoting me to make his case. I said that further education had been neglected in political debate. As part of his strange mannerism, he turned that into some kind of acknowledgement that we neglected the financing of further education when the figures I gave showed clearly that we had not. We have expanded financing in real terms and presided over a spectacular increase in the number of students in the decade we have been in power.

Mr. Straw: The record will show whether I quoted the right hon. and learned Gentleman correctly. I had no interest in misquoting him. He makes enough comments against himself for me to quote him correctly. I noted him

[Mr. Straw]

saying that further education had been comparatively neglected. The word "finance" did not pass my lips when I repeated his statement, although, as it happens and as the departmental report which he published last week made clear, further education funding per student has gone down in the past three or four years.

The further education system has developed and expanded, as I pointed out. There has been a shift to tertiary colleges and that has been of enormous importance in increasing the opportunities available, especially for 16 to 19-year-olds, in many areas. That has happened despite, rather than because of, the Government.

The Department of Education and Science has dragged its feet for years over reorganisation and has failed to change the outdated and archaic procedure for reorganising schools and colleges. For the last four years, any local authority seeking to deal with the problem of unviable sixth forms in its area, to provide for and expand opportunities for 16 to 19-year-olds, has faced the astonishing dilemma that if it named a school's sixth form for closure, that school could then seek to opt out, and Ministers have been known to be capricious in deciding whether to accept or reject such opt-out proposals.

We saw, for example, how, in the city of Bath opportunities for 16 to 19-year-olds were wrecked by the capricious decision of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predecessor to allow the Beecham Cliff school to opt out. Successive Secretaries of State have failed properly to fund further education—that fact is acknowledged at any rate by some with knowledge of the system—especially in respect of the capital, the building stock, of further education.

If there are no good educational arguments for the change to central control of further education, one wonders why the Secretary of State is going down this road and is intending to split responsibility for 16 to 19 provision. There are two reasons for that. The first can be answered in two words, poll tax, a point that the right hon. and learned Gentleman failed to mention.

The Government's policy was first announced to the House on 21 March of last year, not by the Secretary of State for Education and Science but by the Secretary of State for the Environment. We recall that extraordinary day when five statements were made, all brought together out of the panic of the Secretary of State for the Environment and his Cabinet colleagues trying to solve the dilemma of the poll tax.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is not true.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State announced it, so he must have a defective memory. I shall refresh it, as policemen say in the witness box. The evidence is on the record to prove that the Secretary of State for the Environment came to the Dispatch Box first and announced what would happen to further education. He left the Secretary of State for Education and Science to give the details but the reason for the policy was announced by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. Clarke: No, no, no.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State appears to have forgotten that.

Mr. Clarke: I shall make no more remarks about policemen and notebooks. If the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard*, he will see that I made a statement explaining the policy. It may have been a fortuitous coincidence that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made an announcement on the same day, but if the hon. Gentleman thinks that he is producing a conspiracy theory that we introduced that policy only because of the community charge, he is sadly mistaken. The day that I came into office I was determined to introduce such a policy because of the success of the polytechnic policy, of which I had been so firmly in favour some years before.

Mr. Straw: I cannot speak for the Secretary of State's private thoughts on the day that he came into office, and I should not wish to intrude on those except to say that he must have been in a state of shock when he took office on 2 November 1990. He will have been as surprised as anyone else to get the job.

I shall quote the Secretary of State for the Environment —it is no more a misquotation than when I quoted the Secretary of State for Education a moment ago—whose statement was made before the Secretary of State for Education and Science made his statement in the House on 21 March 1991. He said:

> "The reduction in the local tax burden and the correspondingly larger contribution from central taxation announced in my right hon. Friend's Budget statement"—

that meant an increase in value added tax to 17·5 pence in the pound—

> "imply a need to consider whether a number of functions should now be brought into or financed directly by central Government."

As the right hon. Gentleman denies the idea of centralisation, we should weigh the words

> "brought into or financed directly by central Government."

The statement continues:

> "That would be without further changes to the balance between central and local taxation.
>
> My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is bringing forward today proposals for such a transfer in one area of his responsibility."—*[Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 402.]

There is no question about the fact that it was to do with the poll tax. The Secretary of State knows that and the Secretary of State for the Environment said it.

Mr. Clarke: Do not be ridiculous.

Mr. Straw: It is on the record. What is more, had there been a complete separation of thought between the transfer of about £2 billion of funding and the need to get the Government out of a hole on the poll tax, why on earth did the Secretary of State allow that statement to be made on the same day as all the other statements on the poll tax? The Secretary of State for the Environment stole his thunder.

Mr. Clarke: Before this kooky theory runs any further, may I say that I went on to make a statement and announced the policy. The quotation that the hon. Gentleman read from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment does not say that I made a statement because of the need to transfer further education spending from local to central Government taxation. I introduced such a policy and it has been adopted by the Government. It was announced on the same day because it happened to switch some of the expenditure from local to central Government, but it did not put further education under central control. The only reason why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made his statement first was convention: he is senior in the Government. Regrettably, on that day there was far more interest in the announcement on the community charge than in the vital matter of the reform of further education.

Mr. Straw: I am not sure what a jury would make of the right hon. Gentleman's explanation, but my view is that he is guilty as charged. As we have a corroborated confession statement, voluntarily offered before consenting adults in the House, we have the Secretary of State "bang to rights". If the Secretary of State does not like us saying that that is why he took that route—I have no doubt that that was the reason as it was how Government publicity managers and the Secretary of State presented it on that day—the Secretary of State cannot wriggle out of it.

The second reason why the Secretary of State has gone down that odd route of taking central control over further education is his obsession, as we heard again this afternoon, about local councillors. It verges on paranoia. He cannot speak about local councils without sneering at them. When he does so, he sneers at the rights of local people to elect their representatives and have a say in the running of their areas.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

The Secretary of State's contempt is even greater for Conservative councils than for Labour ones. No one has ever said that local councils should have complete control over the education service, but they should have a say in it and their right, as elected representatives, is significant. A substantial part of further education should not be passed to unaccountable, unelected quangos, as the Secretary of State proposes. His failure to acknowledge that right has already led him into a policy that is grievous to him—the privatisation of the schools inspectorate—and I regret to say that it is leading him into another.

In a few weeks' time, Ministers and Conservative Members will expect Conservative councillors to work for them in an attempt to bring them back into office. It may be sensible if they listen to what their Conservative colleagues in local government have to say about the Bill. For example, the Prime Minister's Conservative-controlled local authority, Cambridgeshire, said:

> "There is widespread and deep concern in both the FE and schools sector that the proposals are fundamentally flawed, that they lack a convincing and cogent rationale and that ultimately they will not work".

The Secretary of State was disparaging when I suggested that that would lead to central control—a phrase that the Secretary of State for the Environment seemed to imply.

Conservative-controlled Essex council said:

> "In reality, the apparently free-standing colleges would be controlled by new remote national councils in England and Wales which would, in turn, be controlled by their respective Secretary of State who would appoint their membership, and ration their funding. This represents an unhealthy centralisation of power over a service that is essentially concerned with meeting the needs of individuals locally".

Mr. Dunn: I wanted to take up the hon. Gentleman's point about contempt for local authorities. Was there not contempt in circular No. 1066, which required local authorities to go comprehensive under a Labour Government? Was there not contempt for local education authorities in the Education Act 1976, which compelled local education authorities to go comprehensive? Is there not contempt now for local authorities in Labour party policies—and a future Labour Government, if ever elected—which would compel local education authorities to go comprehensive against the wishes of the local authority and elected representatives?

Mr. Straw: I thought that the hon. Gentleman would say that. Incidentally, it was circular No. 1065. Nothing in what I have said is inconsistent with the suggestion that admission arrangements for schools should be settled by the House. That has happened under this Government as much as under previous Governments. I understand the hon. Gentleman's embarrassment, especially in his constituency, because on the one hand he says that he wants to keep grammar schools but on the other some of the 106 grammar schools closed by this Government were closed when he was a Minister responsible for education. In the 13 years since 1979, 106 grammar schools have been closed.

There are enormous objections to the scheme for taking over further education specified in the Bill. The Secretary of State has sought to justify the scheme by saying that it is based on the experience of the polytechnics. As was explained at enormous length in another place, there is no parallel between the position of the polytechnics and that of further education and sixth form colleges. The polytechnics were national institutions. For eight years before they went into the polytechnic and colleges funding sector there was a quasi-national arrangement under the national advisory board in which the local authorities participated. For years before that, there was the advanced further education pool, which ensured that there was a system of national funding, although local authorities were responsible individually for the institutions in their area. Therefore, there was a long history of build-up towards a national system.

We supported the final removal of the polytechnics from the local government sector to the polytechnic and colleges funding sector. By 1988 it seemed anomalous that they should be responsible to their local authority, because they were national institutions. There are only 80 of those institutions, including small colleges, compared with 550 sixth form and further education colleges. All those FE and sixth form colleges are local and serve local needs.

Contrary to what the Secretary of State said, he should be aware that the greatest proportional expansion in polytechnics took place between 1980 and 1988 when they were under local authority control. There was approaching a 40 per cent. increase in the number of full-time students attending polytechnics. It was just as well that that took place. Although I welcome the Government's present policy to expand higher education, that has not always been their policy since 1979.

At the beginning of this Administration, when the Secretary of State was Sir Keith Joseph, there was a policy not of the expansion but of the contraction of higher education. Paradoxically, the part of the system that was supposed to be the most autonomous, the university sector, maintained its numbers more or less level while the local authority controlled polytechnics met the expanded demand. The expansion was led and met by local authorities, albeit with some benign support from some people in the Department of Education and Science.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): The hon. Gentleman is right to pay tribute to the polytechnics for taking the burden of the expansion—and it was a burden at that time. In all fairness, however, he should praise the Government a little and perhaps give even a tiny sliver of praise to former Ministers responsible for higher education for gently encouraging the polytechnic system along that road by firmly steering them towards cutting their unit costs.

Mr. Straw: I said that the expansion was supported by part of the Department of Education and Science. I am sorry that I did not mention the hon. Gentleman by name, but I am happy to do so now and to commend him for his role. I hope that that does not damage him too much in the forthcoming general election.

There is no parallel with the polytechnics. Because of that, the Government are having to accept a much higher degree of bureaucratic control for the further education sector than exists with the polytechnics. For years the polytechnics have been effectively running themselves. They have effective, sound, central administrations.

The problem with the further education sector is that it is variable. The college of which I am a governor has a substantial administration. I fully support that under devolved management from Lancashire county council it has much greater day-to-day autonomy. That is welcomed by all. It can run itself, and I look forward to its receiving corporate status. There are smaller further education colleges—for example, one in Coventry that disastrously ran off the rails and was saved only by local authority intervention. Some sixth form colleges have no administration——

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): No free-standing administration.

Mr. Straw: No free-standing administration. I am grateful to the Minister for that correction.

Because there are 550 colleges, we should recognise the need for much closer day-to-day bureaucratic control from the funding councils and the regional bodies than there is in respect of the polytechnics. In truth, the Government are replacing locally elected authorities with unelected regional and national bodies for running further education.

The third objection is that the elimination of local authority involvement will lead to a duplication of facilities for further education and 16 to 19-year-old provision. It will remove the dynamic for change that has been there until now. The local authorities have been the midwives of change. The Secretary of State winces at the suggestion, but it is true. I know that he does not like local authorities, but he must acknowledge that they do some good. In one area after another local authorities have recognised when sixth forms have become unviable and have made proposals for transferring sixth form work to local sixth form colleges or further education colleges. It has often been difficult. Some schools will always object to the removal of their sixth forms, but it is widely recognised in Conservative and Labour-controlled areas that, in general, where a switch to tertiary education has occurred, it has led to a great improvement in and expansion of the opportunities, both academic and vocational. There is no question about that.

One of the major defects of the Bill is that no body or institution has responsibility for securing that change. Small sixth forms will carry on despite high unit costs and will be unable to offer a range of courses. The whole system may atrophy.

The fourth objection to the FE provisions is that the Bill paves the way for future Secretaries of State or colleges to end free education for 16 to 19-year-olds. We have expressed our concern about creeping privatisation in the education system. Under the Education Reform Act 1988 education in schools, including those for 16 to 18-year-olds, must be free. There is no similar provision in respect of further education. Education for 16 to 19-year-olds has been provided free as a matter of practice, not as a matter of law.

In the other place Lord Peston, because sixth form colleges are to be removed from the school system, moved amendments to make the law clear beyond peradventure that education would continue to be free for 16 to 19-year-olds, regardless of whether it took place in schools, sixth form colleges or FE colleges. I regret to say that, although the amendment was carefully drafted, the Minister, Lord Belstead, resisted it. He gave an undertaking that it was not the intention to change the practice. I am afraid to say that we have all heard that sort of undertaking: it was not the intention to double VAT.

In reply to the debate, Lord Peston said:

> "This issue concerns the fundamental principle that education in the compulsory sector and in the full-time post-16 sector should be and must be guaranteed to be free."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 January 1992; c. 172.]

As there is a major question about whether the law is adequate to guarantee that education for 16 to 19-year-olds should be free, I should like to hear from the Secretary of State that he is ready to accept an amendment similar to that moved by Lord Peston to make it free regardless of where it takes place.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As the law stands, the Government could at any time have pressed for the introduction of fees for further education for 16 to 18-year-olds in FE colleges. We never have. It is not our policy to charge fees for further education. We are completely committed not to introduce fees for further education. All this is a bit of a red herring.

Mr. Straw: I am not sure that the Secretary of State is aware of the point. Far from being a red herring, the matter was debated extensively in the other place. If there is no intention of charging young people for their education beyond 16, why will the Secretary of State not consider the amendment that was carefully drafted and put forward by Lord Peston in the other place and accept it in Committee?

The fifth objection is that these proposals contain no clear policy for increasing participation rates. The Secretary of State made heavy weather of the current figures on participation rates. He tried to include young people on youth training schemes to dress up the figures. I have with me the latest volume of educational statistics. Although they show a welcome improvement, the proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education —not just youngsters doing their GCSE resits—in 1989 was 37 per cent. That is below any other major industrialised country mentioned in the DES table.

The Secretary of State himself admitted that the current situation is far from satisfactory. When he finally got round to making a statement, on 21 March last year, after the Secretary of State for the Environment, he said:

> "We still lag behind our competitors in the participation of our school leavers in further education and training and their achievement of useful qualifications."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 432.]

I am glad that Ministers realise that we are at the bottom of the league.

We would do what the Trades Union Council and the Confederation of British Industry have been urging, which is to set clear targets with the aim of achieving, over five years, a situation in which 80 per cent. of young people obtain what is called national vocational qualification level 2, roughly equivalent to 5 GCSEs, grade A to C, and over a 10-year period 50 per cent. achieve NVQ level 3.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), in December 1989, committed the Government to such targets as a matter of policy, but those commitments were ratted on only a month later by the then Prime Minister and by the current Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). We believe that targets should be set and adhered to by Government and local authorities and that they should be the basis for funding and for expansion of the system.

The sixth objection is that, while the Secretary of State and the White Paper talk in fine phrases of ending the academic and vocational divide, there is nothing in the Bill about ending it. All that is proposed is a piece of elastoplast to stretch over the distinction between A-levels and vocational qualifications. That elastoplast is to be called an advanced diploma when what is needed is a merging, an integration, of the academic and the vocational examination systems, as we proposed, well ahead of the Government, in our advanced certificate of education and training. We propose a single examining authority which would bring together the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and that part of the schools examination assessment council dealing with 16-plus examinations.

Mr. Walden: This is not a frivolous intervention. I am quite impressed by the Labour party's recognition of the need to stream in secondary schools as between the academic, the vocational and the technological, if I have understood the hon. Gentleman correctly. That is very much in the thrust of Government policy, although it goes only halfway. What is the logic of doing that at secondary level and then creating what I would regard as a dangerous mush between the academic and the technological and vocational at a higher level?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman, I know, writes for *The Daily Telegraph* and evidently he also reads it, but he should not always believe what is written in it. I will send the hon. Gentleman a copy of our proposals both for key stage 4 and for post-16.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth) *rose*——

Mr. Straw: It is quite important that I get on, because many hon. Members wish to speak. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, if he insists, but it is taking up other hon. Members' time.

The right hon. Gentleman closed off once again the question of the reform of A-levels. This has been proposed widely, not only by the Opposition but by Conservative Members as well. We want the Government to accept the proposals made in the Higginson report, which the Secretary of State's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), was ready to endorse on behalf of the Government until his opinion was countermanded by the then Prime Minister. The Secretary of State is virtually alone in seeking to maintain support for the over-specialised three-subject A-levels. The vice chancellors want reform, the directors of polytechnics want reform, most employers want reform and not only do those involved in the state school system and the further education system want reform but so do, for example, the Girls' Schools Association and many Conservative local education authorities.

The case for reforming A-levels is not about reducing standards, because the five-subject A-level would be more stretching, tougher on most students, than the three-subject A-level. The case for the reform of A-levels, as Higginson proposed, is that it would end this over-specialisation at 16-plus, which ensures that a very large proportion of our brightest youngsters leave full-time education between the ages of 16 and 19 without adequate education, particularly in science and technology subjects.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can be saying that the Labour party supports Higginson; I do not think that anybody supports Higginson any more. The hon. Gentleman is evading the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden). He is describing the abolition of A-levels and their replacement by one system of examinations for all 18-year olds, whatever their aptitude, ability or inclination, because he cannot stand the idea of distinguishing between the academic and the vocational. Does he really think that by the age of 18 every young man and woman can be expected to take the same examination or enter into the same system of qualifications without damaging the standard of the A-levels, which he so dislikes?

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State completely fails to understand the issue. It is a matter not just of understanding our policy but of understanding the argument against three-subject A-levels. We have supported the five-subject A-level for almost as long as the Higginson report has been published. If the Secretary of State wishes to end the academic and vocational divide and is serious about that, there is no reason why there should not be different examinations which cater for young people with a vocational bent, or for those with an academic bent, or for those who wish to follow some subjects of an academic nature and some of a vocational nature——

Mr. Pawsey *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment because he is always very persistent.

There is no reason why that range of opportunities should not come under the umbrella of a single examining board. Indeed, if that is not done, we will not break down the academic and vocational divide. That is the experience in France and in many other countries.

Mr. Pawsey: If the hon. Gentleman has his way and abolishes A-levels, what will the implications be for the existing three-year degree of his five-subject A-level course?

Mr. Straw: It is not our five-subject A-level course; it is the Higginson committee's. That committee was set up by this Administration, reporting to this Administration, and whose recommendations Education Ministers wanted to accept in 1988. The answer to the hon. Gentleman is that the vice-chancellors and the directors of polytechnics want the five-subject A-level because they realise that it will mean that their students will be far better educated and prepared for higher education than they are at the moment.

Let me deal briefly with the issue of adult education. Adult education, as the Secretary of State finally, although reluctantly, admitted, has been in many ways a credit to local education authorities in this country. Some people have described it as the jewel in the crown in the work of local education authorities. It is a service which has developed locally, like further education, and has been wholly neglected by Government.

The proposals in the White Paper and in the Bill threaten the whole structure and delivery of adult education. It is no good the Secretary of State dismissing all the objections to his proposals as nonsense. I am very glad to have acknowledgement of what I am saying by the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr). One cannot just dismiss the views of local education authorities, Conservative as well as Labour, of students in adult education and of associations of a non-partisan, non-political nature, such as the women's institutes and the Women's Royal Voluntary Service. One cannot dismiss the 6 million people who take part in adult education as having objections which are nonsensical, as the Secretary of State has sought to do, as if they had invented the proposals which the Secretary of State explained so poorly to the House earlier this afternoon.

The truth is that Ministers never properly considered the impact of these proposals on the adult education service. They were put in as a postscript and never considered. If they had considered them they should never have come forward with these proposals.

Sir John Farr: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way because it gives me an opportunity that the Secretary of State denied me to tell the hon. Gentleman that the adult education proposals have been put to Leicestershire education authority since I saw the Minister last week. The authority unanimously turned them down as being totally inadequate.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who usually fully supports the Government. In addition, Leicestershire county council is not a Labour authority. If the Secretary of State cannot convince his hon. Friends about the sense of the proposal, he cannot convince anybody. That is because the proposal is plainly daft. It is fundamentally flawed in distinguishing between what is work related and what is leisure related.

The Secretary of State said that the Bill does not cut a line between one part of adult education and another. But it does, and that is clearly shown by the drafting contortions in schedule 2, which lays down the courses that will come under the further education funding council. It is ludicrous, farcical, that because a course for basic literacy in English or to improve the knowledge of English of those for whom English is not the language spoken at home comes within the ambit of the further education funding council, a German who wants to learn English will get the money from the FEFC but an English person who wants to learn German, but not in pursuit of a GCSE, has to get the money from the LEA. How will that affect those who deliver adult education? The Secretary of State sought to explain this bureaucratic circus, this monstrosity that he has invented, but I am afraid that not only were we not convinced but few of his hon. Friends were.

Let us look at the case of someone who attends a flower arranging course. On the face of it, flower arranging seems to be a leisure-related rather than a work-related course. During the course, someone might discover an aptitude for flower arranging and decide to become a florist. Who will fund that course? What about cake decoration? To begin with, a person following such a course might do so out of interest and might later decide to become a caterer and work for a qualification. Who will fund that? These are serious questions.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): In his speech, the Secretary of State did not allow an intervention on Humberside where there is a large adult education centre. It is devolved to the rural areas, including the rural parts of my constituency. It will be split in two, with half the vocational courses going to the funding council and half being left with the LEA. When they are split in half, they lose the infrastructure of the outstations and small colleges, which they maintain, and they lose half the staff. They have to go cap in hand to the college which has vocational courses. What happens if they are not relinquished? The proposal cuts the service in half and threatens courses in rural areas.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right. The Secretary of State said that the proposals for adult education were "straightforward". I say to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) that they are as straightforward as the maze at Hampton Court.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I fail to see what is complicated beyond understanding in Humberside college having to obtain funding from two sources. If two sources support different courses, that does not have the consequences that the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) claims. A cake-making course is a ridiculous example. If a local authority finances such a course, and sets fees, which it can do, it does not have to strike off the course a student who suddenly decides that he wants a cake-making qualification. This is a nonsensical campaign about a part of the Bill and the reforms which do not affect the ordinary provision of adult education in anything like the way that the hon. Gentleman seeks to claim.

Mr. Straw: It is not a nonsensical campaign. If there was any merit in the Secretary of State's proposals, it would be reasonable to suggest that any of his hon. Friends would support him. Not one sought to speak in support of his proposals.

Mr. Harry Greenway *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I shall not give way because I wish to make progress. There is enormous scepticism and a great deal of opposition to the proposal, and the Minister knows that as well as I do.

I shall deal briefly with higher education. The first issue is quality control. During the debate on the Queen's Speech, the Secretary of State sought to assert that quality control in higher education could be adequately protected simply by using the funding council. He failed to see any reason for distinguishing between those involved in quality control and those involved in funding. I am glad to say that, in the other place, the Government accepted the need for some separation in terms of quality control because the quality control committees of the funding council will have to have a majority of members who are not drawn from that council. In Committee, we shall table amendments to seek to make quality control quite separate from the funding councils, because that is the best way to ensure the proper maintenance of standards.

We were glad to hear that the Secretary of State had finally accepted the arguments in favour of controls on his power to dictate to individual institutions. The original powers were not minor. There was a try-on in 1988 and the powers were potentially monstrous. We are glad that the Minister has accepted the Beloff amendment. However, there is great merit in the amendment moved by Lord Simon of Glaisdale in the other place for affirmative resolution control on the use of the powers. We shall table such amendments in Committee.

The Government have no mandate for the Bill, which represents a centralising and authoritarian takeover of local colleges and the replacement of local accountability by a new, untried and bureaucratic system under the Department of Education and Science. They have no mandate to railroad the measure through under the guillotine that will be debated later. The further education sections of the Bill are fatally flawed. They have no educational justification but were born of the poll tax. We may not defeat the Bill, but it is one more reason why we shall defeat the Government in the coming election.

6.36 pm

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): There is much in the Bill which is to the credit of the Secretary of State who conceived it. Unhappily, he has knowingly and deliberately polluted it with a breach of principle so serious as to render the Bill itself unacceptable, and it is to that which I shall direct my attention. It is concerned with the community colleges. May I mention in passing that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State appears to be under the mistaken impression that community colleges are confined to rural areas? His actual words were: "In rural areas, we will have community colleges." The city of Plymouth is not a rural area. Does he mean that the college there will be closed? Is that the Government's intention?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No, nor, as I have sought to explain, do the provisions which I suspect my hon. Friend slightly misunderstands pollute the Bill in the way in which he feels strongly that they do. The Government have no intention of closing Plymouth college, and nothing in the Bill need lead to any change in the arrangements at that college. The funding council will make its arrangements for provision as it judges best in accordance with the Bill's provisions. I think that that meets my hon. Friend's point. The proposals were amended at one stage to try to meet his point.

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: If the Bill had been produced at very short notice and introduced first to the House, it might have been possible to assent to it on Second Reading in the reasonable hope and expectation that it would be acceptably amended in Committee. But that is not its history. Early in September, having ascertained that that was not too late to secure alteration to the Bill, I and my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller), who for more than 12 years has taken a constructive interest in public sector education, took a deputation of five community college principals to see the Secretary of State.

The important breach of principle is this. It is an elementary principle of natural justice that an arbitrator must never have a personal interest in the result of his arbitration. I would have hoped that that principle could not be denied by anyone in this House. It is that principle which the Secretary of State has knowingly and deliberately breached.

The community colleges have to submit funding applications to arbitrators, that is to say, to further education colleges, who themselves have a perfectly natural and proper interest in attracting maximum course funding for themselves so as to spread their overhead costs over the largest possible number of courses. They are arbitrators because they are not automatic forwarders of such applications to the funding councils. They have an incentive not to do so. So the principle of natural justice, that an arbitrator must not have a personal interest in the outcome of his arbitration, is violated, and that pollutes the Bill unacceptably.

I have the distinct impression, which I cannot escape after five months of negotiation and correspondence with my right hon. and learned Friend over this, that he resents the fact that the actual pattern of education in some parts of Britain is different from his conceptual pattern which he wishes existed instead. Community colleges are an extremely intelligent way of using resources because the physical structure of the school, much of the equipment and the facilities in it are used by adults when they would otherwise be used by no one.

For that reason, quite often they are part-funded in those facilities, not just by local education authorities but by district councils as well, so that people living locally can use, for instance, the gymnasium or the sports hall or the swimming pool when it would otherwise be put to no use at all. In other words, the whole surrounding community benefits, and the taxpayer, both national and local government, gets better value for his investment in the premises concerned.

I shall have to speak of reality rather than concept. It is all very well for my right hon. and learned Friend to say that the local education authority can pay for this and pay for that. The reality is that, within the constraints of the standard spending assessment under the revenue support grant system currently in use, they do not have that real option, as opposed to conceptual option, because their resources are so fully committed—particularly in rural areas where the pattern is one of the widespread existence of small schools—that they simply do not have the optional resources left over to employ in a way which the

[Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop]

Bill permits, but there is no reality of use for those powers because the resources are not there, and we cannot expect them to be there.

So the community colleges, which probably make the best single use of the capital investment in them, provide further education and adult education as well as their primary function of secondary education. This means that the children at that school for secondary education can have a wider spectrum of syllabus opportunity, since some of the same staff who teach less popular disciplines to the children can be retained because they are also teaching adults in the adult education function of it.

Now I come to timing. It is no good my right hon. and learned Friend asking us to look at clause 53, which gives him power to make orders, if there are bloody-minded FE colleges that unreasonably refuse to further applications. Time is of the essence. When there was a Liberal-controlled education committee in Devon, and its then chairman, a certain Mrs. Rogers, grossly abused the governors and staff of Burlescombe County Primary School so that I had to ask the Attorney-General to intervene, and he located a power which the then Secretary of State for Education and Science had to remedy the situation by order, only one day before the commencement of the new term could that order be made, because of the steps that had to be gone through to avoid the possibility of the order being frustrated by an application for judicial review.

The essence of this is timing. To enable a community college to put on courses that are actually attended, time is crucial. To start with, in April for the coming year the governors and senior teaching staff have to draw up their syllabus programme—the programme depending on the syllabus, of course. They have to do that within their financial resources, and they do not know what the total throughput will be, over which they are spreading their overhead costs, unless and until they know what adult courses they are going to be able to put on as well. To imagine that they can wait week after week while section 53 is first put into operation and then grinds slowly on in such a way that it will not expose the Secretary of State to judicial review is unreal, because, after the community college has decided what courses it wants to put on, for which it believes there to be demand, it cannot then send its application to the funding council: it has to send it to an FE college. The FE college has then to discover what all the local bus services are, in an area with which it may not be very familiar, for access to the FE college, because it has to decide whether it itself is making adequate provision for the area served by the community college. It is no good the Minister of State shaking his head. If he does not know that, he has not mastered his subject.

This can be very time-consuming where there is more than one FE college covering the same area. It means that the one FE college to which the application was made has to discover what courses are contemplated by the other FE college, as well as local availability of public transport, which itself is not guaranteed to run for any particular period of time. The governors then have to make sure that the staff, equipment and materials are available. All that has to be done in time to advertise the courses and get a response from the potential users, the adult students of those courses. Only then, before the beginning of the new term, can it be decided whether the courses will actually be provided.

Meanwhile, those who have applied for them, in the expectation that the courses will be there, do not and cannot know, because the governors themselves do not and cannot know, whether the courses will be there. If the application is not sent on by the FE college—in other words, is not approved and sent on to the funding council—the whole of that will have aborted, and in many cases the potential adult students concerned will have lost the opportunity to apply for alternative courses elsewhere.

This is the real world about which my right hon. and learned Friend and his junior Ministers appear to be wholly ignorant, or alternatively about which they would prefer not to know.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Much of what my hon. Friend is saying is also relevant to Leicestershire—particularly his point about remoteness and distance. In Leicestershire, the adult basic education service is not provided in colleges of further education. Sometimes, it is not even provided in community colleges but instead in church halls or even people's homes. Therefore, it is all the more important that it should remain as a free-standing service rather than being dealt with, unfortunately, in the way that the Bill would deal with it. The whole basis of my hon. Friend's speech, which I am following with great interest, is, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. He has knowledge of the educational pattern in his area of which I am ignorant, just as I am more familiar with the educational pattern in my part of Devon than I am with that of north Devon.

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that what we really require for good education is peace? That is the problem as I see it—I hope that my hon. Friend will agree. In my area, we have six community colleges and sixth form colleges of which I have not, in 30 years, had one single complaint relating to the courses offered or to the pleasure of learning taken from them. Should not the logic be that we allow these community colleges to continue with direct access to the funding authorities so that they can go on, without let or hindrance, wasting time or anything else, doing a very good job? As my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) said, if the machine works, for goodness' sake leave it alone.

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: I am grateful for that contribution from my hon. Friend, because his area is different from mine, in one of the most dispersed educational patterns of any LEA in England.

I shall conclude by saying this. The Bill has already been through another place, where there was every opportunity for my right hon. and learned Friend to secure amendment to it so as to deal with the real problems, which I am not drawing to his attention for the first time tonight, which were drawn to his attention when he was good enough to receive the deputation in September, to which I referred earlier, and which have been pressed since by correspondence invoking such weight as the Patronage Secretary may happen to carry as well: but without success.

What has emerged is a certain number of sub-clauses which cannot meet the need because they are incapable of functioning with sufficient speed to meet the time programme, which I have described, I think, with complete accuracy. It is because of the determination of my right hon. and learned Friend not to accommodate his Bill to the reality that exists, but instead to resent the reality that exists for not meeting the concept of the Bill that, with great regret, I shall find myself in the No Lobby tonight.

6.53 pm

Mr. Michael Carr (Ribble Valley): The Liberal Democrats share the Secretary of State's aims for a better educated and trained people. We also applaud his reference to a continuing entitlement to education, and his stated aims for a near-universal further education and a mass higher education system. All these are laudable aims.

In higher education, we welcome the ending of the binary divide. This move has widespread support, both inside and outside the House, and it is long overdue, as the Secretary of State said. We hope that this will lead to a choice of courses unfettered by the names of institutions. People have been guided by the reputation and the names of certain institutions when they might well have chosen a course more appropriately taught in a polytechnic. We hope that this will disappear with the ending of the binary divide.

However, the expansion of numbers in higher education poses a number of problems. Are the expanded numbers to be catered for simply by cramming more students into existing buildings and on to existing courses? Will there be an extension of the large-scale block lecture approach, to cater for the number of students who we hope will enter higher education? Will there be access to research on equal terms? Perhaps the Minister will explain how the Secretary of State intends to achieve that—the Secretary of State referred to it briefly.

There has been reference to the terms and conditions of academics teaching in higher education institutions. The Secretary of State dismissed the idea of a pay review body, but not too convincingly. We should welcome a pay review body.

The Secretary of State also mentioned quality control in higher education. I was glad to hear that the quality control function of the further education councils is to be distinct from their other functions. However, I should have preferred an extension of the powers of Her Majesty's inspectorate in this sector to ensure independent review of quality control in these institutions.

The divide between academic and vocational qualifications is to be ended. We see this as a vital and essential step forward, but it is difficult to see how it can be achieved with A-levels continuing in their present form. Without reform of A-levels, the removal of the academic/vocational divide will remain illusory and elusive. In itself, the gold standard of A-levels will ensure that the divide continues, although I accept that that is not the Government's stated intention.

It is clear from the Bill that the Government do not like local government or trust local democracy. It is apparent to many people working in education that the Bill is part of a continuing attack on local government, given the background of successive Acts of Parliament since the Government first came to power and their repeated attacks on local government, not just on its education powers. It is also clear that the Bill gives the Government a way to get off the poll tax hook—something that has also been referred to already. It can create, and will create, an opportunity for the Government to fiddle about with poll tax levels.

On a more practical level, there is a danger that the variety of 16-to-19 provision that will exist after the Bill becomes law will make the rational planning of post-16 education more difficult. The local education authorities will retain responsibility for sixth forms in schools, albeit on a locally managed basis, and for non-vocational adult education, while further education funding councils will have the responsibility for sixth form colleges and FE colleges. Diversity may be one word for it—we welcome diversity—but there is also a risk of confusion and difficulties in planning.

I want to refer very briefly to colleges that combine further education functions and higher education functions. I am thinking of institutions, such as Bradford and Ilkley community college, that students can enter with no formal qualifications whatsoever and leave with a degree. I visited the Bradford and Ilkley college two or three weeks ago. There, and in similar institutions, there is genuine concern that it may be difficult to achieve that combination. I hope that the Minister, in his summing-up speech, will address this problem.

Mr. Eggar: I have paid two visits to Bradford and Ilkley community college, and I do not think that there will be any difficulty for it. In respect of schedule 2 courses, it will be funded by the further education funding council, and in respect of higher education courses it will be funded by the higher education funding council. In addition, the local education authority will continue to provide funding in that area. I should remind the hon. Gentleman and some of my hon. Friends that colleges such as the Bradford and Ilkley community college are very used to having lots of different sources of finance for lots of different courses.

Mr. Carr: I want to turn to adult education. The Secretary of State has said that there is no threat to the pattern of continuing education. He has said that local education authorities have a duty to provide non-vocational education for adults, that funds will be provided for that purpose, and that it will be for the authorities to distribute those funds. In September, he expressed the same view in a rather bullish letter to all his colleagues, following the summer campaign organised by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the women's institutes and other bodies. The fact that he did not convince those organisations is shown by the letters that I and other right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House are still receiving.

The local education authorities will lose the money that would have been allocated to them for further education. A large slice of the education budget will be devolved to schools under local management. I am worried that, when the responsibilities for statemented pupils, education welfare and school transport have been discharged, local education authorities may find it difficult to fund the very non-vocational courses to which the Secretary of State referred. Perhaps the Minister's summing-up speech will provide some clarification on that point.

Mr. Jessel: Does not the hon. Gentleman think that he ought to wait to hear what the Minister of State says in response to my intervention and to points made by other hon. Members on this very subject?

Mr. Carr: I have made my comments on that very point, and I do not propose to dwell further on it. We shall indeed hear what the Minister says when he sums up.

The Secretary of State, who said that he does not often refer to questionnaires, referred to a questionnaire that had been sent to college principals. I should like to draw attention to a question to which he did not refer. It is about the likely future balance between vocational courses and non-vocational courses following the introduction of the measures proposed in the Bill.

Forty-three per cent. of college principals felt that there would be fewer so-called leisure classes, and 14 per cent. of them thought that overall provision would decline. The college principals have views to which the Secretary of State probably did not want to refer, but I have now made them available.

The Government's propaganda on adult education is not being believed. Adult colleges are in a difficult position. Richmond college, which has been referred to, has 25,000 students—more than many further education colleges have. There is concern about how this funding will be secured if further education colleges, for their own reasons, are not too willing to forward applications.

There is a growing feeling that adult education colleges that do not have governing bodies as legal entities ought to have such bodies, and that smaller adult education centres ought to be able to form consortia, with a governing body recognised as a legal entity. If we have to go down this road of funding councils, if we have to lose local democratic control, the adult institutions themselves and the consortia could apply directly to a funding council. Indeed, it has been suggested that perhaps there ought to be an adult education funding council, but that matter is not within the scope of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) referred to people gaining from leisure courses skills that enable them to enter self-employment or to go on to courses that will equip them with qualifications. That is an aspect of adult non-vocational education that we understand and accept, but there is another dimension. Adult non-vocational education is not only about self-employment or about the possibility of further qualifications; it is also about self-fulfilment, about the meeting of personal needs that fall within the broad definition of education. I am concerned that that aspect may suffer. For many elderly people, women and individuals living alone, the so-called leisure classes provide an opportunity for self-fulfilment.

Underlying everything is the suspicion that the question of additional resources—the one thing to which the Government do not refer in this Bill—will be skated over. If the numbers in higher education are to be expanded, if we are to continue to provide adult non-vocational classes, if the number of people participating in education beyond the age of 16 is to expand, there is a resource implication.

The Government ought to be honest and say that, if they are to achieve their own stated aims, they may—from the point of view of Conservative Members, heaven forbid —face the possibility that income tax will have to be raised. My party has said that it would do that. We are prepared to provide the funds that education needs by increasing the standard rate of income tax by 1p in the pound. I should like to see from the Government a commitment to the provision of increased resources.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has applied a 10-minute limit to speeches delivered between now and 9 o'clock.

7.9 pm

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): In this House, it is a convention that hon. Members declare existing interests. I do not have an existing interest, but I think that it would be courteous to declare that, after retiring from the House at the general election, I shall become vice-chancellor of the university of Buckingham. Against the background of all the exciting changes that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is bringing about, I regard that as a wonderful challenge.

I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on this Bill, which will strengthen our policies on further and higher education. Our record is clearly a good one. It is interesting to reflect on my time at university, which I confess was 30 years ago. At that time, one in 14 of those aged 18 years was able to go to university. In 1979, the ratio was 1:8. Today it is 1:4, and we anticipate that by the end of the decade it will be 1:3. There has been remarkable change. Over the past 10 years, the number of students at polytechnics has increased by about 50 per cent. There has been a 55 per cent. increase in the number of mature students. Clearly there have been significant changes since 1979. These figures demonstrate the scale and pace of the change that has taken place.

Our university system has a good reputation for the quality of eduction within it. It is interesting to note that graduate output in the United Kingdom is the same as that of France and of Germany. Fewer students are admitted to the United Kingdom university system, but the drop-out rate here is far less than elsewhere. The rate here is about one sixth, whereas in many universities elsewhere in Europe it is about 50 per cent.

Mr. Pawsey: Perhaps my hon. Friend will care to speculate for a moment on the plan of Opposition Members to reduce the A-levels to five-subject examinations. What impact does he think that that will have on the degree system in British universities?

Sir Richard Luce: There have already been some exchanges on this issue, which is a serious one. Our concern is to increase and enhance the quality of our university education, which is already extremely good. The Channel 4 commission on education had this to say:

> "British graduates are acknowledged throughout the world to be of a very high standard. Our job is not only to maintain that but to enhance it still further."

The Bill surely does a great deal to strengthen that purpose with its single funding structure, with the absorption of polytechnics into the university system, with separate higher education funding councils and with important procedures of quality assurance. All these factors are singularly important.

Above all else, the Bill will help to increase competition between institutions for students and for funds, but on the basis of equal status between different types of institution. That will be underpinned by a firm system of quality assurance, which is an extremely important feature of the Bill.

I turn now to academic freedom. Towards the end of his speech, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State gave the important assurance that the Government would not seek to reverse the amendments that were made in another place. That assurance is singularly important, and I am grateful to my right hon and learned Friend for giving it. However, when he and his ministerial colleagues examine the Bill in Committee, I ask them to take a fresh look at clauses 68 and 81. My experience in Parliament over the past 21 years is that the law is incomprehensible. The two clauses still lack comprehensibility, and it needs to be beyond all doubt that the Secretary of State has no intention of interfering in the academic freedom of universities. That must be made absolutely clear in the Bill.

Surely the principle is clear: that no Secretary of State of whatever Government should have the right to intervene specifically in the affairs of individual institutions in a way that affects the academic freedom of those institutions. It must be right, however, that, when dealing with taxpayers' money, the Secretary of State must be accountable to the House for that money. I draw an analogy with my experience over five years as Minister for the Arts. Sensitivity about preserving the artistic freedom of bodies funded by taxpayers was such that I think that, if I had tried to intervene, for example, in the affairs of the royal national theatre or the Royal Opera house, in terms of how they presented their productions and what productions they undertook, I would have been strung up in Whitehall, and rightly so. It is essential that we preserve the principle of artistic freedom.

The same considerations apply to academic freedom. There are funding bodies for the arts, such as the Arts Council, and for education there are the new funding councils, which will act as a cordon sanitaire. They will take specific decisions on the funding of individual institutions and on the quality of their academic courses. There is an important distinction. It is right to preserve the powers of the Secretary of State to give general direction within an overall policy on the allocation of funds to the funding councils, but he should not intervene in any way to call into question the academic freedom of universities, whether the criterion is selection of staff, the admission of students or the duration of courses.

I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has stated in a White Paper and has said himself—I happen to agree with him—that he believes strongly in the idea of introducing more two-year degree courses. I agree that there is a case for that in some circumstances. Indeed, the university of Buckingham is a pioneer. It would be wrong, however, for the Secretary of State to intervene specifically and instruct an individual university on the duration of its courses.

I hope that, when these matters are debated in Committee, the role of the Secretary of State will be made absolutely clear. The principle is enshrined in clauses 68 and 81, and hon. Members will be aware that clause 81 deals with financial mismanagement and provides that, as a last resort, the Secretary of State has the right to intervene.

If the Secretary of State or the Government are not to intervene on academic freedom, the Government and all of us in this place must be assured that the proposals for maintaining and building upon the quality of education is deeply enshrined in the Bill. There has been reference already to the Robbins era of the 1960s, when there was fear that a dramatic increase in the number of students would mean a lower quality of education. Accordingly, my right hon. and learned Friend is right to place in the Bill procedures for maintaining quality—the highest possible standards of quality, with the minimum of bureaucracy.

There is the proposal that the quality audit unit should be enabled to go into institutions, as it were, to ensure that their mechanisms for maintaining quality are adequate. Secondly, there is the quality assessment unit, which the funding councils will appoint to help to ensure that the good quality of education in universities is upheld. Those procedures are right, but in the other place there was great debate about how independent of vested interests the units would be. That is a crucial consideration.

If my right hon. and learned Friend is saying that Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools should be independent, we should ensure that the quality assurance units are as independent as possible. Some concessions have been made, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will offer us some strong reassurances when he replies.

The Bill enhances and strengthens the prospects of improved quality and those of a much wider range of education at the higher level in universities to cater for the varying needs of a greater number of students. This education will be infinitely diverse in terms of the range of courses, the balance of teaching and research and the duration of degree courses. There will be much more flexibility. Parents and students will have greater knowledge of what the various institutions offer. There will be a range of institutions to cater for a greater variety of needs among our students, including those of mature students and those who wish to take up part-time courses, as well as those who are interested in the Open University and in distance learning. The Bill goes a long way to strengthening all these possibilities.

7.18 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): As all the previous speakers have declared vested interests, I shall do so as well. My constituency contains a polytechnic, part of Sheffield university and two further education colleges.

Many have welcomed the late conversion that has driven the Government to remove the binary divide between polytechnics and universities, and to create a single funding council for higher education. I am now hopeful that the polytechnics will play an important role, along with the universities and the rest of higher education, in developments not just at city but at regional level.

As the speech of the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) amply demonstrated, two issues still cause concern—the conditions governing the grants referred to in clause 68, and academic freedom. I hope that the Minister will deal with both. Recently, the polytechnic and the university in Sheffield have entered into a strong working partnership with the city as a whole, and that has had a regional impact as well. I believe that the economic regeneration now taking place in the area has been helped by the close working relationship of what are now the two local institutions of higher education, and by the development of technology transfer and science parks.

Further education is a subject of considerable contention. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has pointed out, we have removed one impediment—the divide between polytechnics and universities—only to institute two new boundaries which may be equally damaging, if not more so. To suggest that

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

the recent release of polytechnics from local authority financial control should be extended to the further education sector is, in my view, to advance a dangerous and, indeed, ignorant argument. It may, of course, have been the only argument available to the Government—albeit a weak one—when they were trying to cover up the fact that they had taken more than £2 billion from local authorities' further education budgets. As my hon. Friends have revealed, that took place during the panic about the poll tax calculations. It is all very well for the Minister to shake his head, but that is the truth, and I think that most people outside know that it is.

The Government have made their calculations for a change in the funding of at least 500 further education colleges at a time when we have only a handful of polytechnics. It shows ignorance for the Government to claim that the role of polytechnics is the same as that of further education colleges, for that is entirely untrue.

I am a product of a further education college. Having left school at 15, I served an apprenticeship in one of Sheffield's major steelworks and then, thankfully, attended the further education college. I sat on the board of governors of two such colleges for some time. I also attended Sheffield polytechnic, and I know that they are entirely different institutions, fulfilling different needs. Further education provides for local needs, and to break up the system now would be highly detrimental to the recovery that we look for in the United Kingdom.

On the board of governors were local industrialists and local trade unionists; there was also a major input from the local authority. It is no good for the Government to ask for economic regeneration and to expect a partnership to develop across the major conurbations, and then to think that some elements can be isolated—elements such as the further education colleges, which are an integral part of the training mechanism.

If we are to start upgrading schools—you will understand this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a former engineer—we must not do it in an offhand way or at arm's length. It is important to understand the role of the further education colleges, which is quite distinct from that of the polytechnics. They serve national, international and regional needs. People across the political and industrial spectrums are concerned about the direction in which the Government are pushing further education colleges.

It was interesting to note the concern expressed by Conservative Members about the community colleges. It highlighted the need for flexibility in the development of that sector of education for the over-16s, along with the need for security of funding. Security of funding must involve democratic accountability, and that, surely, must be obtained through elected bodies—local authorities.

One of our main criticisms of the further education provisions in the Bill is that they will not achieve the stated objective of a significant increase in the number of people entering higher education, or continuing in full-time education between the ages of 16 and 18. Furthermore, it is bizarre and wrong to exclude local education authorities from strategic decision making in respect of post-16 education and training. That will open unnecessary divisions between the school and college sectors.

It is incomprehensible that local authorities, which are frequently the largest employers in an area or city, should be excluded from governing bodies. It is wrong to say that the governing bodies can contain employers, but that local authorities cannot represent their employees on those bodies. The time scale is rushed, and is likely to cause major implementation problems. The distinction, for funding purposes, between vocational and non-vocational education is artificial—as was adequately demonstrated by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn—and is likely to prejudice the hundreds of thousands of students who participate in non-vocational education.

The Government are wholly silent about the nature of funding mechanisms, and the Department has failed to respond to any of the detailed questions put to it by local education authorities. That has been reflected by what Conservative Members have said. The further education clauses of the Bill are being pushed through in the teeth of widespread public disquiet and opposition—witness an earlier question about responses to the White Paper. Those responses have not been published, although I understand that they have been asked for on a number of occasions both here and in the other place.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman has made a variety of inaccurate accusations about the Government's position. Perhaps, as he is speaking on behalf of Sheffield's local education authority, he will comment on that authority's attitude to the forced bringing together of Sheffield's six colleges.

Mr. Caborn: I intend to discuss that at length, but I shall not do so in the 10 minutes that I have been allotted this evening. If the Minister will ask me the same question another time when I am not under such a constraint, I shall answer it with pleasure.

Let me deal with the general issues of education and training, and how they are dealt with in the Bill. Although there was a considerable increase between 1979 and 1988 in the number of young people in youth training schemes, the absolute number of 18, 17 and 16-year-olds pursuing full-time education increased to 131,000, 232,000 and 336,000 respectively. Those figures represent percentage rates of 18, 33 and 47. That may seem a good achievement, until it is compared with that of our major competitors—for instance, the United States, Japan, Germany and Belgium. In 1988, the percentage of 16 to 18-year-olds who participated in full-time education and training in the United Kingdom was only half that achieved by our major trading partners.

Between 1979 and 1989, there was a significant increase in the number of home full-time students in higher education—from 184,000 to 250,000. That is welcome, but it really means that it will be more difficult to widen the pool that has not grown significantly—the further education pool—unless access is made much easier. More counselling and development work will be needed at the bottom of the social ladder.

Funding is of great concern to many local authorities. Only a proportion of the provision currently made by further education and tertiary colleges will be funded. Students will count for funding purposes if they follow courses leading to vocational qualifications; but the non-vocational side is very important to inner cities. It is no good for the Government to come to the House and complain about riots after they have neglected those matters in the Bill.

7.29 pm

Sir Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): I hope that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), with whom I have much in common, will forgive me if I do not reply to his speech. This is almost certainly the last occasion on which I shall have the privilege of addressing the House of Commons. Perhaps it is appropriate that it should be on the subject of higher and further education.

We should not dwell on the past or on the disagreements that I have had with my right hon. and hon. Friends. I should like to concentrate on the Bill and on the future. Although I found myself in overwhelming agreement with the Bill as it was first introduced, certain sections of it were rightly amended by the Lords. The fact that the Lords made those amendments and that the Government will agree to them means that I shall support the Bill wholeheartedly.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State repeated the differentiation between applied and pure research. There is no differentiation between pure and applied research. How could we have found the anti-diphtheria drug, penicillin, insulin or histamine without pure research? They were the results of pure research. The genius of certain people in the past, such as Cavendish, Wellcome and others, was that they invested in pure research on the offchance that something commercial would come of it.

I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State that the key problem—I admit that it is a difficult one—relates to the powers of the Secretary of State and the Government on the one hand, and to the doctrine of university autonomy on the other. I accept that the latter doctrine was carried one stage too far. Self-government and autonomy in higher education are enormously important, but the taxpayer and the Government also have some responsibilities.

When I had some responsibility for such matters, I was struck by the extraordinary variety of our institutions. I became convinced that central Government should have much great influence, but not to the detriment of the individuality and initiative of different institutions. It is a question of balance, and it is difficult. However, I believe that the Government have accepted that, and that the Bill represents the degree of that balance.

I warmly welcome the fact that so many excellent polytechnics, especially Anglia, will receive university status. I congratulate the Ministers who were principally involved in that.

Although it is not the dominant purpose of this Bill, I hope that the House will forgive me if I refer briefly to problems of finance, and especially to student finances. I cannot refer to academic salaries because I have a potential interest. The funding of higher education, and especially of its students, raises a profound problem, to which neither party has addressed itself seriously. They have produced palliatives and promises, but not answers.

Perhaps such matters should be removed from the sphere of party politics and, indeed, from Government. I am not suggesting another Robbins inquiry or another royal commission, but perhaps the Secretary of State and the Government should set up an advisory committee comprising people who understand and are deeply involved in higher education, to advise them not on tactics but on strategy and to look forward to the next five or 10 years. I am deeply concerned, for example, about the way in which we finance research. It is a question not of money but of the allocation of the money and the criteria that are used. The problem applies to all the research councils; I do not want to concentrate on any particular one. Huge sums are spent—some usefully, some not—but nobody is in a position to judge whether the money has been spent properly. I suggest that an advisory body—not the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, but one that does not have a special interest—could advise on strategy.

In the 25 years that I have served in the House, I have endeavoured to outline my concerns to it. I shall now return to academic life; to scholarship; to the love of learning for its own sake, which I believe is still the dominant purpose of higher education; to the excitement of a new generation eager to learn; to the sheer fun of education, which people sometimes forget; and to the joy of seeing one's students do well and to the sadness of sometimes seeing them not do as well as one would wish.

Education, which politicians talk about as something political, is a personal matter. It is the relationship between the teacher who wants to teach and someone who wants to learn, and it is precious. The teacher rejoices at every pupil triumph and mourns at every failure. There is a glow about the glory of true education which is impossible to describe. I wish that the House, when it stops arguing about whether Conservative policies are better than Labour or Liberal Democrat policies, would remember that the true lure of higher education is the love of learning for its own sake. Our job is to try to finance and to encourage that.

7.36 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): It is a great privilege to follow the hon. Member for Cambridge (Sir R. Rhodes James), who has given 25 years' distinguished service to the House and has had a distinguished career in international relations and scholarship. I am sure that we all wish him well as he renews his distinguished academic career on leaving the House.

It is also a great privilege for me to speak in the debate because prior to being elected to the House I was a lecturer. I have been a student at Manchester polytechnic and the University of York and a lecturer in polytechnics and in the university in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn).

I welcome most of the higher education provisions in the Bill, such as the removal of the binary divide. The binary divide in higher education has been similar to the unfair distinction that used to exist between grammar and secondary modern schools. I hope that we resist all opportunities to reintroduce that distinction while we remove those in higher education.

If there is to be parity of title between the polytechnics and the universities, I hope that we shall also ensure parity and equality in resources. I am pleased that the last institution in which I worked, Brighton polytechnic, will become the University of Brighton. I wish it and all my former colleagues there the very best for the future.

I am concerned that some of the current inequalities between polytechnics and universities will not be removed as we enter this new era in which polytechnics and universities have the same title. I trust that, when polytechnics become universities, there will be positive action to equalise resources and to ensure that teaching facilities in polytechnics can be improved, and that the

[Mr. Huw Edwards]

former universities can learn some lessons from the polytechnics. I hope that there will be improved library and research facilities and improved student residential provision in the polytechnics.

One of my hopes for the new era is that some of the best in the polytechnics will be transferred to the universities and some of the best in the universities will be transferred to the polytechnics. That will create opportunities for former polytechnic staff to engage in research and have the facilities and resources to do so.

I hope that in the new era we shall see education for education's sake and get away from the obsession with entrepreneurism which has dogged academic life in recent years. I know the skills as lecturers that many of my former colleagues had. They were lecturers, not entrepreneurs. As a lecturer I did not mind how many students I taught, but I did not want to be responsible for the administrative arrangements for bringing them into the college in the first place. We were told, "Go out and sell your courses." We could have sold many rather cheap packages.

When I left the polytechnic last year, I was anxious about what I saw as the "pile them in and teach them cheap" philosophy. Although we welcome the increase in educational opportunities in the past 10 years, there is some concern that by bringing students in at any price we devalued the level of education that we could give them. It is not possible to teach students adequately at degree level when seminar groups have 20 people in them or the course numbers increase but the number of books does not increase commensurately to resource those courses.

Let us go back to an education ethos in which students are regarded as a national asset and an investment and not simply as units of income. It causes anxiety to all of us that the expansion in higher education in the past 10 years has been characterised by increasing student hardship and poverty. There has been an attitude of, "Bring them in, but never mind about the financial hardships that many students may face." The right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) said that Britain had lower drop-out rates than many other countries. I fear that the drop-out rate might increase as students decide that they cannot afford to continue or, if there is a parental contribution, parents decide that they cannot afford it.

The Bill also contains provisions for further and adult education. All Opposition Members are convinced that the poll tax inspired the further education provisions and that they were nothing to do with a love of education for its own sake. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) paid tribute to the unsung success of the further education colleges. I recently visited Newport college of further education. I was impressed by the number of access courses that it ran. The college takes students who would never have dreamed of going on to higher education and gives them the opportunity to obtain a degree.

It is important that we do not measure success merely in terms of the number of good degree results—the number of 2:1s or firsts. For people who never imagined getting a degree, a third-class degree is a tremendous educational attainment. I am worried about the obsession with minimising the number of people who receive lower class degrees.

There is widespread anxiety about adult education. This evening, Ministers have tried to give reassurances that adult education will not be jeopardised. That is not the view held by anyone who benefits from adult education, administers adult education or teaches in adult education. Both Opposition and Conservative Members have been lobbied vigorously by organisations connected with adult education. I pay tribute to the local education centres in my constituency and to the women's institutes, the Workers Educational Association and the Hill residential college, Abergavenny, which is a unique institution in Wales providing short-term residential education for adults, many of whom are retired, most of whom are women and most of whom see no distinction between vocational, non-vocational and leisure education. Indeed, the introduction of the word "leisure" makes the distinction even more frivolous.

I hope that the Bill will result in secure funding for adult education and the residential educational colleges. The people who benefit from adult education have largely completed their vocation. In pre-retirement, early retirement and retirement they want to study for the pure sake of learning subjects which they did not need in their working lives.

I conclude by echoing the words of the hon. Member for Cambridge. He said that there was a glow about the glory of true education. I pay tribute to all the people who were involved in education in the 1980s, when it was an unfashionable profession. People taught in higher education and polytechnics and gave references to students who went into the City and earned far more than the lecturers who had trained them for the job. That devaluation and the denigration of people involved in education were worrying. I repeat: let us go back to the time when we could see that glow about the glory of true education.

7.45 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards). He said that he was worried about degree-level teaching and mentioned the shortage of books. But, despite that, he certainly seemed able to consider the devalued A-levels proposed by his hon. Friends. They talk about moving away from the three-subject A-level to a five-subject A-level.

Mr. Edwards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: I will give way later. The hon. Gentleman seemed happy with the idea of a devalued A-level——

Mr. Edwards: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I did not say anything about A-levels and certainly did not advocate devaluing them.

Mr. Pawsey: Exactly.

Mr. Edwards: Then it is wrong for the hon. Gentleman to infer that I believe that they should be devalued.

Mr. Pawsey: With respect, the fact that the hon. Gentleman did not refer to A-levels is a clear indication that he accepts the proposal of his hon. Friends, who argue the case for a five-subject A-level. To increase the number of subjects to five would clearly devalue the entrance to our universities requirements.

The proposals in the Bill give colleges greater freedom and cut the apron strings that secure them to the local education authorities. The Bill reduces the amount of bureaucracy and relieves principals of FE colleges the requirement to deal with bureaucratic budgeting rounds every year and to justify their budget to faceless officials in shire halls.

The Bill will enable the colleges to make a faster response to the requirements of their students and of local employers. It will help to bridge the criticism that education and industry are separate entities, each operating in its own intellectual vacuum. We all know that there is a wealth of talent in the colleges of further education. There is talent to be found in the staff room and talent to be found in the classrooms. The Bill helps to release that talent and broadens the vision. It does for the colleges of further education what the 1989 legislation did for the polytechnics.

An indication of polytechnics' success is the substantial increase in their student numbers. Indeed, the great expansion in student numbers comes from the polytechnics rather than from the universities. While much has been achieved in schools and in advanced education in the past three or four years, FE has been something of a Cinderella. We have not done enough for young people who leave school at 16 or for adults who, for whatever reason, require additional training or education. This legislation undoubtedly helps to remedy that defect.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said, 60 per cent. of 16-year-olds in England participate in further education. Twelve years ago it was 41 per cent. Further education colleges take about 360,000 full-time students, 700,000 part-time day students and 700,000 part-time evening students. Those are spread over about 450 institutions.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the figure that he quoted includes all those youngsters on youth training schemes, only 25 per cent. of whom will gain a qualification? Also, the figure that he quoted is not the real international comparison but the figure for 16-year-olds. We shall be considering 16 to 18-year-olds and all those in full-time education, and that is the real comparison.

Mr. Pawsey: I do not think that there is any difference of opinion between us. It is intended in the Bill for the new further education funding councils to be in place on 1 April next year to prepare for the transfer of colleges from local authority control. It is that date which gives urgency to the legislation. No doubt that will be considered later this evening. Clearly, that is why it is necessary to introduce a timetable motion later tonight.

The further education funding council for England will have a membership of between 12 and 15 and they will be appointed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. They will be drawn from people with experience in education, including those with expertise in administration. There will also be members from business and industry. I have no doubt that colleges of further education will widely welcome those proposals, for they view them—as we Conservative Members view them—as a change necessary to improve further education and to bring it in line with modern practice and thinking.

The second part of the Bill deals with advanced education. Here it is worth remembering that we are catering for a much-expanded sector as a result of the Government's efforts. When we came to office, only one in eight of the target group were in advanced education. Today, the figure is one in four, and it is moving towards one in three. It is the Government's intention to continue that admirable process. The target of one in three by the turn of the century, which we have set for ourselves, will certainly be achieved. That clearly underlines our commitment and our determination to improve the quality and standard of state education for all our people.

I welcome the ending of the binary line. It was always an artificial distinction, separating the universities and polytechnics. In some ways, the old regime protected those universities which were not quite in the first rank and held back polytechnics which enjoyed a substantial and justifiable reputation for learning. I am pleased that the polytechnics can now incorporate the title "university". It will certainly be a great help to them abroad, where there is less understanding of the word "polytechnic".

The Bill introduces a single funding mechanism for universities, polytechnics and colleges of higher education through the higher education funding councils for England and for Wales. The new councils will be in operation from April 1993 and that tight schedule again helps to underline the reason why it is necessary to get this legislation on the statute book with the minimum delay.

The House will recall that under the Bill the Council for National Academic Awards will be closed—the first time that any degree-awarding body has been dissolved. Recently, I met its chief executive, Malcolm Frazer, and we discussed how the 300,000 students on courses under its control would manage under the new proposals. I was pleased to receive an assurance from Malcolm Frazer that no students will be disadvantaged by the changes. We also discussed the question of records. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will wish to take note of this issue when responding to the debate. Clearly, if a student loses his degree certificate, he will require another. I was pleased to learn that arrangements have been made between the CNAA and the Open University for the latter to hold all the appropriate records and to be in a position to offer duplicate certificates. Those are not unimportant safeguards.

I welcome the proposal to establish a quality assessment unit within each funding council. That will maintain good practice and monitor, for example, performance indicators and changing student profiles. The units should also ensure that links with business, industry and education do not deteriorate. The institutions will establish a quality audit unit and some of its members will be drawn from business and industry, as well as from the academic world. Quality assessments and quality audit will safeguard the quality of degrees and ensure that standards do not slip.

The Government's proposals in the Bill will bring substantial benefits to the nation—benefits to students, to employers and to the community at large. The greater freedom being given to colleges of further education will enable principals and staff to display even more inventiveness in courses.

There has already been a massive expansion in the number of people attending polytechnics, and there will be a massive expansion in those attending colleges of further education, which will be of benefit not only to the nation's work force but to those who seek learning for its own sake,

[Mr. Pawsey]

whether as a leisure pursuit or for any other reason, which touches on the issue mentioned earlier by Opposition Members.

I shall bring my remarks to a conclusion simply by saying that I hope that the Bill will soon be on the statute book, where it will be of singular benefit to the British people.

7.55 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I thought that when the Secretary of State introduced the Bill he gave us a demonstration of his usual bull-at-a-gate tactics in respect of yet another field of education into which he is rushing to impose change.

With the claim of simplifying, he is creating a much more complicated structure. In the name of eliminating distinctions, he is creating new ones. That restless process of change is typical of his approach. He introduced it first in the health service, transferred it to secondary education, and is now transferring it to further and higher education. In that process of change, he is not making any allowance for the simple fact that change itself has a cost. Indeed, change is expensive to introduce. Unless he increases spending to allow for the costs of that change, it will fail.

Here we are, in the last dying days in the life of the Government, rushing through a major change in the system with inadequate consultation. The Secretary of State has not demonstrated to us the evidence—the representations from local authorities—on which the change was based. He has not told us what arguments they offered against it. The Bill is being rushed through with a guillotine to follow and with no time to consider it. It is being imposed as the Government go out—with a twilight already shining on their shoulders. The Bill will throw higher and further education into another mess, just another achievement of the bull-at-a-gate Secretary of State in that area.

What I have said does not obviate the need for change, but change has to be managed, has to be carried through by a process of consultation, and has to be financed. That is the danger of the changes which have been introduced by the Government.

My main argument is on the effects that the Bill will have on a service which we are very proud of in Humberside—the Humberside adult education service. I wanted to intervene when the Secretary of State spoke, but unfortunately I could not. We are very proud of that service. It has 100,000 enrolments and 40,000 students, and it provides a valuable service, siphoning people into education who would otherwise drop out or would not be attracted to it, because it provides education where they live—in the village hall, and schools in the locality, in villages and towns, in the main using the facilities of secondary schools.

Although the service provides both vocational and non-vocational training—the Government have created a contemptuous distinction between the two—it siphons people from one to the other.

Mr. Eggar: Since the hon. Gentleman is making all sorts of wild allegations without the advantage of his television researcher, perhaps he could tell us where that division appears in the Bill.

Mr. Mitchell: It is the Government's attitude that non-vocational education is somehow unworthy and should be financed in a different fashion. This money is for the important aspects of education and all the rest is fit for the local authorities—that is the Government's attitude.

Mr. Fatchett: It is in schedule 2.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is correct—it is in schedule 2—and I shall come to that in a minute.

The Government have created that distinction, and it is an artificial one, because people who enter the adult education service in Humberside move from one type of education to the other. After being attracted in, they develop their expertise, and their interest in education is stimulated. They grow. Because it is a comprehensive service, it can siphon them from one aspect to the other and allow them to develop their interest and improve their education. That is an important service.

Adult education represents an important, countrywide service. It is now threatened because 50 per cent. of its work will effectively be taken from it. That work is now to be eligible for application for funds from the funding council, and will not be paid for by the local authority. That means that there is a great danger of splitting the work provided right down the middle. If that happens, the comprehensive service that has been maintained on Humberside cannot be sustained. There will be certainty about obtaining one half of its funding, but uncertainty about the other half. Therefore, that comprehensive service, which maintains facilities for vocational and non-vocational education, will go by the board. That is the danger we face.

I accept that the local authority funding is not ring-fenced, but I am certain that a Labour authority in Humberside will want to maintain services for the benefit of the people. The problem is whether the provision of education in literacy, numeracy and vocational training, which will be transferred to the funding council for resources, will be able to survive.

I know that it is proposed that the adult education service can use a college as a type of post office for the means of applying to the funding council. That is a ludicrous arrangement, partly because the adult education service is larger than any of the colleges. That service provides education for more students than those provided for by several colleges put together. Adult education provides a more comprehensive service than that offered by the colleges, but those colleges will be competing with it. The colleges will not be interested in maintaining adult education services in rural areas, and that is so important because people will have to come to study on campus. In that sense, the colleges are competitors.

If the adult education service in a particular area does not get a college to support its application to the funding council, even though such colleges will probably cater for a smaller number of students and will therefore be less important than the adult education service, the Secretary of State has said that it can appeal to him. I am not sure what appeals to the Secretary of State, but such an appeal procedure adds to the uncertainty. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a comprehensive adult education service unless we have some guarantee and an arrangement whereby it can have direct access to the funding council.

The power to apply to a funding council could be defined in terms of the size of that adult education provision. Why not define the adult education service in terms of the provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988? That Act defined a college as one with 400 full-time equivalents and at least one full-time student. That would give the adult education service the ability to apply directly to a funding council. Unless it has that direct ability, it will suffer. Uncertainty will abound, and it will be difficult to maintain the comprehensive service of which we are so proud in Humberside.

It is also important to consider the dangers posed by the remoteness of the funding council. I know that regional advisory bodies will be established, but we need regional funding councils made up of representatives from the local authorities. Those people would know about the local needs. That is essential. A remote national body will change the system constantly, whatever the fashion is in education, and it will be remote from the needs of local areas. That means that the council will not allow for diversity, which is another valuable part of the education system. We must consider that threat.

Labour colleges and long-term residential colleges, such as Ruskin and Northern, are worried about their role as a vital safety net. Those colleges allow those who develop their interests in education late on to be drawn into the education system. The achievements of those colleges are enormous; I cannot speak highly enough of Ruskin and Northern colleges, the two that I know best. Their achievements are in danger unless there is some specific recognition and entrenchment of their role in the Bill. Those institutions should be added to the existing list. The adult bursary scheme should be maintained, because it is essential to defend and advance it. It allows people to come into education late on—an essential safety net in society.

I hope that the Minister will heed the pleas of the adult education service, the colleges and the long-term residential colleges for the establishment of a funding council that appreciates and understands their needs and is geographically closer to them.

8.4 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): It is right that, at the outset, I should declare an interest. For many years, I have been a member of the council of one university and on the court of another. My law firm also acts for a number of institutions in higher and further education.

I had the privilege of serving on the Committee on the Education Reform Bill. That Bill is already seen as one of the milestones of educational development, and that will become increasingly apparent in the years to come. It was visionary, but I remember clearly that the Opposition attacked and criticised every aspect of its provisions only to find that, within a year or two, they had become part of the accepted wisdom of the education world. It began the process of overturning some of the discredited dogmas which had bedevilled education for more than 20 years.

It is right to consider the polytechnics first, because they have made such outstanding progress since they were liberated from the control of local authorities. The improved participation rates in higher education from one in eight in 1979 to one in four now and moving towards one in three, the flexibility which polytechnics have brought to courses, particularly through the modular method of studying and the significant success of the graduate output rate, which is just as crucial as the number of people starting in higher education, are all features of the growing development and maturity that the polytechnics have brought to our higher education system. That goes alongside the splendid progress already achieved by universities.

The polytechnics have shown that any benefits which resulted from local education authority participation and control in their affairs are far outweighed by the benefits that result from independence. It is clearly time to build upon that progress, to abolish the binary line and to introduce a coherent structure for funding teaching and research across the higher education sector.

If that is true of polytechnics, it is equally true of further education colleges. It is time for those colleges to be given the chance to make similar progress. I am concerned at the stories from a number of colleges about attempts at asset-stripping by LEAs in the final months of their control. They are not just stripping those colleges of their land and buildings, but reducing funding to them in anticipation of those colleges moving out of their control next year. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say something about the protection that he intends to apply to ensure that those colleges, when they emerge free from LEA control, will emerge with their proper share of assets and the revenues to which they are entitled.

My right hon. and learned Friend spoke of the importance of sixth forms and his desire to enhance their future role. My constituency consists mainly of towns and villages on the outskirts of the city of Leeds, and the sixth forms in the local comprehensive schools are important. Many colleagues will recall the bitter battle that was fought over two years when Leeds council sought to abolish our sixth forms. It was only the intervention of the then Secretary of State and, in particular, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), which prevented it.

Obviously, we are concerned that the LEA might threaten those sixth forms again, and I should be interested to learn now or in Committee exactly what my right hon. and learned Friend plans to do to give additional protection for the status of sixth forms. In areas such as mine, schools plan, whether under the local management of schools, or possibly through grant-maintained status, to become more like community colleges. They want to provide enhanced services for the local communities.

I should like to know from the Minister how grant-maintained status will affect the ability of those schools to offer courses to the local community and whether they will be in a better or worse position as grant-maintained schools than they would be as part of an LEA. I hope that the result will be neutral as between the two. Sixth forms are a vital ingredient of schools in rural communities, and the protection that my right hon. and learned Friend announced for them will be very welcome indeed.

Another area of concern, touching the earlier debate about university drop-out rates, arises from what happened at the end of last year in a number of local authorities, Leeds being one of the worst. Mandatory grants to students were not delivered on time. Eight weeks into the term, over 40 per cent. of students from Leeds entitled to mandatory grants still had not received them. Some did not receive them until the first term of the year was over. That was totally unacceptable.

[Mr. Spencer Batiste]

I feel for those students when I recall when I went to university for the first time. Pressures are bound to build up. The thought that one must face those pressures while having to worry where the money to which one is entitled may be—how one will manage one's affairs without that money—is a horrifying prospect. Should there be a repetition of what happened last year in any local authorities, my right hon. and learned Friend will have to consider measures to remove the administration of mandatory grants from LEAs.

In that context, LEAs represent only a post box for funds from the Department of Education and Science. If LEAs cannot deliver that service effectively, he should provide alternatives, and I shall tonight be tabling amendments to the Bill to give my right hon. and learned Friend power to do that. After all, we have organisations such as the Student Loan Company which are building up effective computer databases on the loan aspect. Such a company would be capable of delivering mandatory grants in addition to performing its other tasks. Indeed, we might save much duplication and cost by using one system.

There has been much talk about education for its own sake or education for vocational training. The two are not incompatible. A good education system should have the widest possible availability for as many people as possible. Students who go into the system should be free to make up their own minds about what benefits they wish to take from it. Some will wish to be highly vocational, others will not.

I had an interesting insight into the value of what we have in Britain when, a few weeks ago, I attended a conference organised in London by Toshiba International Foundation. It was looking at the educational demands on a developed society by the turn of the century and trying to predict what changes would be needed. The conclusion of some eminent speakers, including the dean of Tokyo university and other highly distinguished academics, was that the great hallmark of success in the future would be the ability of a nation to handle complex information in large quantities and to apply it to a whole range of activities.

Those Japanese academics were looking enviously at our education system; while undoubtedly they can produce engineers in large numbers, what they found attractive about our system was the flexibility of mind that it produced, of young people able to turn their minds to a variety of applications and retrain relatively easily as technologies developed.

Many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, so I will not make other points that I would otherwise have made. Our intention must be to make higher and further education available to as many people as possible. It must be to ensure that all, whatever their ages, are able to return to the education and training system and take from it the things they need, be they vocational or just for interest.

The Bill will mark another important milestone down the road that we took with the Education Reform Act. I hope that we shall organise our affairs in a way that will ensure that it becomes law before the general election. An enormous amount of work has already been done in the polytechnics and colleges in preparation for their change of status. Much momentum has built up, and if that were slowed down because of the need to start the whole process again after the election, we shall have lost a year that we can ill afford. I commend the Bill and hope that it will reach the statute book as rapidly as possible.

8.14 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Langbaurgh): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Sir R. Rhodes James) for his contribution and I regret that he is no longer in his place. I confess to have been reading his books since I was a school boy. I have deep respect for his sincere views and wish him well in his love of learning and in his new post.

I shall adduce some arguments on the proposed structure for further education arising out of part I of the Bill. I welcome the aims and aspirations of the measure, but deeply disagree with the methods proposed. I shall highlight only a few aspects of the Bill, and I speak as one who has had long experience of further and higher education—first, at the receiving end, as a student, and then as the former chairman of governors of one of the largest colleges in Cleveland, the Longlands college of further education. Under the existing further education structure, that college, with the support of a totally dedicated and hard-working staff, has pioneered innovative and enterprising programmes of training and education in an area which has consistently experienced some of the highest unemployment in mainland Britain.

The Bill is an attempt to emasculate and undermine community and local input into our colleges. If it is passed, there will be another major reduction in the powers and responsibilities of LEAs and the virtual eradication of local staff or non-private sector representation on governing bodies, with no local ability to influence the direction and content of the work carried out in our colleges.

In the name of liberation from local government oversight and administration, as the Secretary of State put it, the Government are intent on installing a system of funding, appointment, direction and control that is positively Napoleonic in content. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's reserve powers will be wide ranging and immense.

The Secretary of State talked about liberating further education colleges from local authority control. Without any representation on governing bodies or any role in quality assurance, the vast accumulation of local knowledge will be squandered. Experience and expertise will be lost and local democratic accountability removed.

If the Bill is enacted, we shall see the total fragmentation of responsibilities in the post-16 sector and in adult education generally. There will be needless competition, rivalry and duplication of effort between local colleges, LEAs, the proposed national councils and free-standing, ostensibly independent, grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges.

There is no proposal as yet for the Secretary of State to set up any form of national co-ordinating body or forum at which the different interests may meet and debate. There is no provision for cross-representation between planning bodies and the governing bodies of colleges. That is a recipe for utter confusion, a waste of scarce resources and a breeding ground for futile rivalries.

The Bill is another sad illustration of the hatred and contempt with which the Government view any institutions that are locally controlled and managed. My hon. Friends and I are totally opposed to the continuing erosion of local democratic accountability for the delivery of such vital services. We utterly oppose the concentration of power at the centre and the spreading and menacing influence of appointed agencies—often run by the Conservative party and its central office—to manage institutions on a day-to-day basis.

Let us examine the facts, including the damage that narrow and ill-thought-out proposals could have on our future. At present, only one third of the 2·8 million 16 to 18-year-olds are in full-time further education. A further 16 per cent. are undertaking full-time YTS training and work experience, while others are attending part-time or evening classes. One third of our youngsters are receiving no education or training. They are unemployed or in the twilight world of dead-end—often temporary or casual—work. Furthermore, those in full-time further education are often participating in a system that, under the prevailing ideology and political stewardship of the Government, is open to the charge of being divisive.

All too often, A-levels are seen as the only pathway to success, forcing the academically able into specialisations that often do not match the country's real needs. The majority of FE students become the recipients of a vocational training system that does not measure up to the standards set by other nations in the European Community—our direct competitors in the coming decade. The Bill will not liberate those students. The competition that it will unleash between local colleges will almost certainly result in local colleges going under, or being forced to close or merge.

The financial controls and financial regime that the Secretary of State will impose will mean that "stand-alone" projects based within colleges will be unable to receive funding and thus may be forced to close. I was involved in Cleveland in setting up one such project relating to the local chemistry industry at the college of which I was chair of governors. There is no guarantee that such innovative projects will be allowed to survive under a rigid, centrally directed further education structure. The knowledge of essential local circumstances that allows a local education authority or training and enterprise council to support an innovative project will be absent, and it cannot be replaced.

Some aspects of the Bill have not been sufficiently worked out. The splitting of vocational and leisure interest courses worries me. What may be a "leisure course" to narrow-minded Ministers can often appear to those at the chalk face as an essential complement to vocational training. A young man or woman studying engineering practice may regard a better command of English as beneficial to his or her ability to convey complex technical matters to someone in his or her firm or to the firm's customers.

I am aware that LEAs will be left with the funding of so-called "leisure courses", although it is not yet clear what funding the Government will provide to local authorities for those courses. It may be argued that local authorities will fund those courses, but in my area we have the spectacle of poll-tax-capped councils having to cut their core services and being unable to expand in other directions. The acquisition of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy must be regarded as essential vocational skills and I cannot stress highly enough the fact that they must be fully included in the funding arrangements.

I wish to highlight clauses 4 and 11, which deal with special educational needs and people with learning difficulties. The formulation of those clauses is weaker than any existing duty of LEAs under the Education Act 1981 and the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. There is no provision for an independent review of the requirements of individuals or for rights of appeal against the level or quality of support available for students with special education needs. The duty extends only to full-time students in the 16 to 19 age group. It is apparent that there is no guarantee for older or part-time students with learning difficulties.

The Bill does not even begin to deal with the real issues of training and further education for 16 to 19-year-olds. We are only weeks away from a general election, after which a new Labour Government must begin the task of facing up to the responsibility of tackling those issues. We have a unique opportunity to enhance and raise the standards of educational provision for over-16s. By 1994, as a result of demographic movements, there will be 500,000 youngsters between the ages of 16 and 19.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has run out of time.

8.25 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I welcome this opportunity of contributing to this stage of the debate, and I am well aware that there are likely to be further opportunities after 10 o'clock.

It is important to my constituents and me that I should recognise the kindness of my hon. Friend the Minister of State in seeing delegations from my part of the world on two or three occasions. The most recent was last week, when a senior team discussed the implications of ABE—adult basic education—ESL—English as a second language—and community further education. The first time that we saw the Minister of State he was impressed because I gave him an amendment to the Bill. That was before Christmas, and the Minister seemed to be inclined to accept it. The first time that a few hon. Friends and I saw the Minister he told us to come back with some experts so that they could argue with his experts to sort out the matter. That is what happened, and last week we were lucky enough to have a good discussion with all the top people on both sides.

I then tried unsuccessfully to explain to the Minister of State why some clauses are totally unacceptable to some of my constituents. When my right hon. and learned Friend would not give way to me earlier on, I wished to say that his suggestion that clause 6 was suitable and wholly admirable had been considered by my constituents. Their views were made known to us last week and we had a subsequent meeting in Leicestershire. For reasons that I fully support, the amendment suggests that the safeguards in clause 6 are inadequate.

Some hon. Members will be lucky enough to be on the Standing Committee. If I am on it, or if any of my hon. Friends from the same county are on it, I am sure that we shall table that particular amendment to clause 5. We have been so awkward, from the point of view of the Whips, because clause 5 is inadequate unless it includes a couple of lines to the effect that the further education funding councils will take account of existing quality providers, as listed under schedule 2. It is a simple amendment. The first time that I suggested it to the Minister he seemed impressed, but last time he seemed less impressed. Therefore, nothing in my consultations with my hon.

[Sir John Farr]

Friends has shown that we should do other than press the amendment in Committee or on Report. It does not alter the character of the Bill, which we all welcome as an improvement to community and further education. It simply recognises that some parts of the world have reached a standard that my hon. Friend can only envisage for other parts of the country.

The Minister need not take my word for it. HMI carried out a detailed and exhaustive examination of Leicester's ABE recently. As hon. Members know, when HMI visits, it tears the institution to bits and takes it apart at the seams. HMI went through the Leicester adult basic education structure. I have with me the full report, but time will not permit to read it now. It is full of admiration for the work of Leicestershire ABE.

The report makes particular reference to the one-for-one education in the home as of right. I need not explain why that is necessary. Many perfectly normal people do not want to learn publicly. For example, pensioners may not want to show that they cannot spell. They may not be 100 per cent. fit physically, but they are alert mentally and often self-improvement is the only thing that keeps them alive. That is what ABE is all about.

I can refer only briefly to the report. It gives many good examples of how ABE is carried out and praises the ABE service in Leicestershire. The conclusion is:

> "Leicestershire has established a strong foundation of provision. It is now timely to consider building on this foundation."

That is not what I say; it is what HMI advised the Secretary of State. With great respect, how dare he ignore that sort of advice about a service that has been taken apart and been seen to be serving the country almost beyond comparison.

The Secretary of State is not in ignorance. He has been told about the report by the Minister of State. As a result of the report and the recommendation that I have just quoted, the Leicestershire ABE service was expanded. All the recommendations in this two-page report have been put into effect. Leicestershire is one of the most progressive ABE providers in the country and it is recognised as such both locally and nationally.

As a result of the report, 13 half-time posts have been turned into full-time posts, a deputy county co-ordinator has been created, its class provision has been greatly increased and a number of its ABE bases have been upgraded. To lose this local, student-centred, urban-rural co-ordinated, well resourced, efficient service with highly trained, well motivated, dedicated staff can be in no one's interest, least of all the adult students for whom it caters.

The time for speeches is limited now, but after 10 o'clock it will be slightly longer, so some of my choice comments can wait until then, but I should like to say a word about community further education. My delegation came from all parts of the county of Leicester. My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) came with a delegation of experts from the county and I brought a few experts. We also dealt with further education. I brought Mike Lee, the vice-principal of Welland Park community college in Market Harborough. He had been in correspondence with me for a long time. We have been extending successive invitations to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and others to visit us.

I must conclude now as I have run out of time, but I hope possibly to resume my speech after 10 o'clock.

8.34 pm

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I will not follow the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) on the Leicestershire question, but I am sure that the Secretary of State will, indeed, make his visit before the election.

I should like to remark on the particularly moving speech of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Sir R. Rhodes James). He said that he was returning to learning for its own sake and for the love of learning. I am certain that his contribution, as with the contribution of many other scholars, is not learning for its own sake because that learning also enriches language and the whole community. It has always been a pleasure to have him in the House during education debates. I hope that he reads the tributes to him from this side of the House as well as from his own side.

I shall deal with the aspects of the Bill that concern my favourite Department of state, the Welsh Office. The Bill represents the latest and final step in the devolution of education policy and administration to the Welsh Office. We now have in place a fully devolved education system. Last year training was devolved and now we have the further education funding council for Wales and the higher education funding council for Wales. I was pleased at the appointment of Professor John Andrews as the joint chief executive of both councils. We look forward to the appointment and functioning of the shadow council.

The official Opposition criticised the FE changes as a form of centralisation. Even from the Welsh perspective it can be argued that to transfer the 30 FE colleges to a body that is accountable to the Welsh Office rather than to have them as part of local government is a form of centralisation. I do not share that view. I see this as creating opportunity for a relatively small-scale system to be treated as one system for planning purposes. Nevertheless, I share some of the concerns expressed about the effect of that on the adult education component. Again, my experience of the FE sector is that already FE colleges are taking funding from different agencies, not least from the training and enterprise councils and, previously, the Manpower Services Commission, where we had many of the most effective innovations in higher education.

In particular, I welcome the commitment in schedule 2 to Welsh medium teaching and to Welsh language literacy. The further education funding council will certainly want to pursue the work that has already been undertaken by the Welsh adult education committee and the Welsh Language Education Development Committee.

It is high time that in classifying education policy we moved away from these artificial distinctions between secondary education, further education, higher education and adult and continuing education. I came to the House from adult education via higher education and for me life is all about education. Education must necessarily include training. I was supportive of the earlier parts of the Secretary of State's speech in which he mentioned the need to develop an education system that was life-long based and able to tackle the present social changes. This provides us with an opportunity for greater co-operation between the TECs, the training component of education, and the further education sector.

I welcome the higher education funding council for Wales. On this occasion I am wearing one version of the university of Wales tie—not the version favoured by the Leader of the Opposition because it is important that we should display diversity.

I am pleased to see the university of Wales being devolved and I certainly do not share the concerns expressed by some in the universities that the devolution of the university to the Welsh Office will give rise to problems in the internal structure of colleges, or the assertion that every higher education institution in Wales should come into some kind of relationship with the university. I believe that there was a strong argument before the devolution that it was important to maintain the university of Wales as a federal institution. If there are arguments now for maintaining the federal structure, they have to be won by that federal structure proving that it is the best way of providing common services to constituent institutions. We have to look not just to the university but to the other institutions of higher education in Wales. They are all now equal partners. There may be an argument, in that context, for moving away from a strong federal structure, as that would tend to dominate the rest of our education within Wales.

The old argument that it is a national university and therefore a national institution and thus needs to be maintained is not one that I would pursue. After all, the Welsh Office is our prime national institution and now it is in charge of our funding. Soon the autonomous council will be administering that funding on the basis of objective standards, and there is not a case, in my view, for a duplication of allocation between the funding council and a joint university structure.

I am also pleased to see reference in the Bill to the position of the Open University. My reading of clause 62(b) is that both funding councils will be able to fund the OU, which means that in the context of Wales the OU can receive additional funding for its operation within Wales. I speak as a former part-time member of its staff in Wales. The OU will be able to receive funding from the higher education funding council of Wales to augment its activities there.

I also have concern, of course, about the position of a college in my own constituency, also an institution in which I once taught. It is important that we have a guaranteed role for such institutions within our reorganised HE and FE sector.

I want to make certain that when we debate the Bill in detail we shall be able to do something about research funding in Wales. Many of us are concerned that, over the years, the UFC, although it has its own scheme for the allocation of research funding, has not sufficiently looked to the distribution within the nations and regions of the United Kingdom of its research funding. I hope that there will be a sufficient funding base for the new funding councils and that they will be able to look at the need for a broad profile of research throughout the higher education institutions which they fund.

When we consider the Bill in Committee we shall need to look in detail at the representation on both the equality body and the funding councils. The major consumers of education are its users and its student body. It is very important that we follow some of the debates that are already taking place in the other place about representation of the student body on the higher education structures.

The Bill represents a positive move forward in the structuring of Welsh education. I cannot share some of the concerns expressed in various parts of the House, certainly as far as Wales is concerned. My anxiety has always been, ever since I came into the House, to see the development of a strong, autonomous education system within Wales. My first Second Reading speech was on education, when I called for a comprehensive over-16 education system in Wales. I was at that time trying to persuade the then Labour Government that it should introduce such a system. I find myself making what I assume is my last speech in a Second Reading debate on education congratulating a Conservative Government on having done just that.

8.43 pm

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): I start by declaring an interest as an adviser to the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, the union I joined when I first started work as a polytechnic lecturer in 1975 just across the river at South Bank. Since 1975, we have seen some tremendous changes in higher education —certainly, since 1979, changes of which Conservative Members have every reason to be proud. We have seen student numbers increase and the quality of the graduates keeping pace with the numbers going into higher education.

I am very pleased to say that it is the polytechnics that have played the lion's part in the expansion of higher education. I am happy to have been a lecturer during that time and to have contributed to that expansion. Other speakers in this debate, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Sir R. Rhodes James), have talked about the joy of teaching. Certainly those of us who come into the House and who have taught before find that it is the one thing that we miss. I would have liked seminar classes the size of the audience this evening at times when I was lecturing.

I am particularly pleased that the polytechnics have now been recognised as coming of age and are to be able to be universities. It was a great step forward when they were set free from the local authorities. I worked for the South Bank poly, which was controlled by the Inner London education authority, and I saw the effects of that control on my polytechnic. We were a limited company, with something very similar to the corporate status which the Opposition would like for further education colleges, while still remaining within local government control. I know the problems which that situation caused. I can therefore well appreciate the attitude of principals of further education colleges in wanting to follow the polytechnics down the line of independence from local authorities, although, one would hope, still maintaining very close links with those authorities, but having their independence and their funding coming from elsewhere.

When I started as a polytechnic lecturer, I had moved from the university system, where I had been trained. The contrast was stark, in that all the students whom I taught as a polytechnic lecturer had a very clear idea what they wanted to do in their careers when they left. They therefore had a certain keenness in their vocational training.

[Dr. Ian Twinn]

The polytechnics started out with that mission—in my case, the Borough polytechnic at the turn of the century. The polytechnics have had a long and noble career in fulfilling their mission of technical and vocational education. But we saw the breakdown of the binary divide while I was still lecturing. It was impossible to talk about the quality of an individual institution; it was impossible to talk about the quality of individual faculties. If one wanted to make comparisons within higher education, one had to look at the quality of a department, if not of a degree course itself. Certainly, there were plenty of university degree courses within my field of geography and town planning that were recognised as being very inferior to those courses that had been provided by polytechnics for many years.

As a lecturer, I was rather cynical about polytechnics which started to ape universities and call their heads of department professors, for instance, and start to look and behave like universities. I was rather against changes of that sort. But, as time went by and the difference between universities and polytechnics disappeared and polytechnics were taking their part in the expansion of higher education, it became more and more difficult to justify that binary divide. Finally, I changed my mind when I came across the problem when talking to representatives of overseas higher education institutions, who just did not understand what a polytechnic was. On a number of occasions when South Bank polytechnic was trying to negotiate research contracts jointly with European institutions, the latter said that they dealt only with universities, not technical colleges. It took a considerable time to get through to a German institute, for instance, the fact that we were not just a technical college, but a polytechnic, a higher education institute. So the practicalities of being a polytechnic became very difficult indeed.

The change to university status will be welcomed. However, I see one problem and perhaps in his winding-up speech the Minister will address it. Although we are to abolish the divide in terms of funding, I am concerned that the new funding council could end up discriminating between institutions. It may take a stance on the level of research and give more research money to some colleges and universities than to others. I hope that that does not happen. We must ensure equality of treatment by the new funding council. I hope that funding, certainly for research, will be based on the results obtained in faculties or departments and not in institutions. Let us introduce some real competition to higher education. All academics know that competition already exists. We know which university and polytechnic departments we rate highly and which we do not. We do not always speak about that, but we are free with such advice to prospective university students.

I hope that the new institutions and the Government will ensure that this great step forward for polytechnics comes to fruition. There is a dire need to implement the Bill's provisions. As hon. Members have said, the polytechnics have been planning for some time for university status and the power to award degrees. Some students in my constituency who are registered for Council for National Academic Awards degrees expect to have a degree from the University of Middlesex and not from the CNAA. I can understand their excitement about that. As a former academic who had to deal with visiting panels and who had to try to get new degree courses established, I am pleased to see the CNAA go. It did not inspire much confidence on the bottom rung of lecturing, although I have no doubt that it was popular with those who sat on the visiting panels trying to stop new courses. I have never known an institution that tried to crush competition in quite the way the CNAA did when I was a lecturer. I welcome the debate on the guillotine motion because it will ensure that polytechnic students can look forward to graduating from a university.

8.52 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I should like to declare an interest that may be relevant. I am a trustee of Barnsley college educational trust. I shall confine myself to further and not higher education, and I shall deal with the problems in my constituency which for many years has had a low take-up of post-16 education. We are at the bottom of many league tables for such take-up. The local authority tried desperately to remedy the situation, which has a long history. Many years ago, employment in mining was easily available and many 16-year-olds took a job in the industry. That entailed a certain amount of training. There are, of course, other reasons for the low take-up, one of which is a culture bias against further education.

The local education authority rationalised its sixth forms and established a sixth form college. It became a tertiary college with open enrolment to encourage more 16-year-olds to take up further education. The Bill threatens much of what my local authority has been doing for some years and puts at risk the hard work and money that it has invested in the tertiary college. I remind the House that my local authority is 36th out of 36 in allocations of revenue support grant to metropolitan districts. We get the lowest amount, and the effect is especially acute in education. We are now faced with the loss of the tertiary college and, perhaps more importantly, with the loss of any input into the college's future education provision.

The Bill will allow colleges and further education institutions to become corporate institutions funded by the further education funding council. That will cut off any local authority or local government influence. There will be no opportunity for local authorities to pursue further education policies to encourage take-up or to increase take-up, such as is required in my LEA. There will no longer be any LEA governors. Even the minor input to the governing body will be removed from local authorities. That illustrates the Government's opposition to local government influence in any aspect. We have seen attack after attack on local government, and mine has suffered more than most, especially in terms of the grant allocated to it in the past few years.

It seems strange that, while a Bill to restructure and inquire into local government is going through the House, another Bill seeks to remove further education provision from local authorities. The Government could have waited until after the publication of the commission's findings. The commission may well report that it would be better to keep education under the control of local authorities rather than passing it to the further education funding council or to corporate colleges. Those colleges will compete with each other through the provision of courses simply to attract more and more students. Poor take-up or the loss of students to other colleges could lead to college closures.

The director of a college that is the neighbour of a college in my constituency summed it up when he said that he intended to turn Barnsley college into a car park. My town and my local authority could lose a college as a result of the competition engendered by the Bill. How will the people in my area have a choice if our college is closed? How will local needs be addressed if students in my area have to travel many miles to colleges in other towns? Obviously, colleges will have to try to reduce costs and increase the numbers of students if they are to stay in business.

We are also concerned about the removal of accountability. As I have said, colleges will not be able to respond to local needs. There is no way in which people in my constituency could take up any issue or grievance about further education other than through the private college and then, presumably, to the Secretary of State.

Over the years, my local authority has tried desperately to obtain a higher take-up of post-16 education. In Barnsley there have already been clashes between the local college and the local education authority because the college, which is now a private company, has decided to go in the opposite direction to that in which the local authority wished it to go. The courses offered formerly by the college which generated income for the local authority are now being offered through private companies, with the money from those courses going to the college itself as opposed to the education authority. It is that type of control over the content of education provision that is worrying. Courses will probably be offered that do not assist in a local area or are irrelevant to it—that may happen in an area such as mine which is trying to encourage the take-up of post-16 education.

Another big fear of mine concerns charging for further education. That will be particularly unwelcome in an area such as mine which has unemployment of well over 11·5 per cent. Were further education charges to be imposed, they could have a detrimental effect on the people in my area.

The transfer of assets also concerns me. Two colleges are involved—the tertiary college to which I referred and the Northern college. The tertiary college was formed from two town-centre college buildings and a secondary school which was closed to become part of the college. If those facilities were to be transferred to a corporate college, it would result in a substantial loss of facilities for my local education authority, such as sports fields, arts facilities, a theatre and a hall. They would represent a major loss to the local authority and would not be available for the local area. How can the local education authority make anything of its residual power for adult and part-time education if it has no facilities in which to house those assets?

Perhaps the transfer of such assets would be better done by way of a lease so that, should the college fail or should it have to come back into local education authority ownership, the buildings and facilities would still be in the ownership of the authority. That might ensure the continuation of the college.

The assets of any college include its staff. Although there is to be continuation of employment for the lecturers and staff, there seems to be no guarantee of any jobs for the lecturers and teachers once colleges become corporate institutions. What guarantee have the staff of a future within the college structure?

Northern college is in a unique position in that it is funded by local authorities in south Yorkshire, one of them being Barnsley metropolitan district council. The college was established by local education authorities and, were it not for the involvement of those authorities, it would not exist. Other hon. Members have paid tribute to Northern college. It would be a shame if it were put under threat by the Bill.

The college is housed in a stately home owned by Barnsley metropolitan district council. It is surrounded by a considerable acreage of land which includes an ancient monument, Stainborough castle, and other areas of natural beauty which belong to the authority. It bought them in the 1940s and 1950s to house the then Wentworth Castle teacher training college, which later became Northern college. It is inconceivable to me that the Government will remove from my local authority the ownership of the college and the grounds in which it stands. They are a major tourist attraction, apart from being a college and its surroundings, and over the years my local authority has spent a considerable amount on building up the original college and then on providing facilities for Northern college to start up.

Ownership of the facilities should remain with the local education authority, even if Northern college is designated as a relevant college for the purposes of the Act. I hope that in his response the Minister will say what will happen to Northern college under the provisions of the Bill. I should also like him to say whether it will be able to retain the character of its courses—mainly adult education and trade union courses. Although there are one or two colleges like it in other parts of the country, it would be a shame if such courses were to be threatened by the Bill.

9.3 pm

Mrs. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I am particularly concerned about youngsters between the ages of 16 and 19. I have always been a supporter of sixth form centres and colleges, even when many people were against them, and I should like to make sure that nothing in the Bill will limit choice for 16 to 19-year-olds who want to go to sixth form centres. Until now, 16-year-olds who have outgrown school or some who have not done well at school and want a fresh start have had the choice of going on at school or of going to local sixth form centres.

The Secretary of State was evasive about whether education would continue to be free in the new organisations. There may be charges for textbooks and materials, which would be prohibitive for children from poor families, as many families are in Tower Hamlets.

I want to be absolutely sure about the question of child benefit. The child benefit regulations say that the mothers of youngsters from 16 to 19

> "still in full-time non-advanced education"

are entitled to child benefit. I want to be sure that they will still be classified as school pupils entitled to child benefit when the changeover takes place. I would not like us to wake up and find that there had been an unfortunate change in this respect. I want child benefit payments to be guaranteed.

More in doubt are the means-tested discretionary grants, worth about £300, that many local education authorities give to youngsters from poor families. That is

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very little, but I know of a number of cases where the family is living on the margins and must have some money coming in from the 16 to 19-year-old, and that £300 has made the difference to whether a youngster can stay on in education. Unless the Bill makes some provision to allow them to be replaced in the new organisation, the changeover will mean that those discretionary grants will go to the wall.

I do not want possible charges to mean that higher and further education will be for those of independent means, and that people who have little money will not be able to continue in education after 16. I also wish that in the Bill there had been a move towards what I would call comprehensive education beyond 16. Up to now, youngsters taking vocational or academic courses have been the ones provided for, but there should be enrichment courses for any youngster who wishes to stay on. This is particularly important in areas such as mine where the attainment level is lower than in many other parts of the country.

Youngsters should be able to state what they want. If they want to study typewriting, ceramics or a language for three months, or do a short one-term course in music, they should be able to do so. It might give them a taste for education and lead on to further courses, and even if they just take a short course, it enriches their life and adds to their cultural development. The Bill should cater for—but does not—that kind of development.

Many of the women's organisations such as women's institutes and the Fawcett Society are angry at the approach to so-called leisure education and the false division of education between vocational and leisure. Many women come back into education through courses that, under the new classification, might be termed leisure courses, for which they will have to pay quite high fees. As women have less money than men on the whole, because their wages are lower and they have less chance to accumulate money and savings, it will be harder for women to return to education. All the hullabaloo about the Prime Minister's charter for women will seem rather cynical if there are fewer women in higher education by the year 2000. That is a bad development.

I have found in Tower Hamlets that adult education is really being squeezed because local education authorities, now that there has been a change in the business rate, are finding it very hard to secure funds. A community education staff group approached me last week. Their courses were slashed first by 20 per cent., and this year by another 20 per cent., and they plan to hold a meeting about the decimation of adult education.

So-called leisure courses, which are becoming expensive and, in many areas, are being abandoned because of lack of funding, are very important to working-class people. For instance, many women go to car maintenance classes. Without such classes it would be unsafe for them to run a car. Many pensioners get great enjoyment from these classes. They are kept young, active and alert in mind and body, and as a result the state saves a good deal of money in the health service and in other ways. If adult education classes become so expensive that people on low incomes cannot afford them, or if they have to close down because local education authorities are squeezed by a reduction in the amount they get from the business rate, a serious blow will be dealt to women and older people.

As I know that at least two other hon. Members wish to speak, I shall not take up much more of the time of the House. However, I wish to refer to the question of democracy. This too affects women. Women are under-represented on boards and on all political bodies, but local government is one area in which they have better representation. If funding of further education is removed from elected local councils we shall be left with a less democratic and less accountable system. Women will have no influence at all on the funding councils to be nominated by the Secretary of State. This too is a retrograde step.

9.11 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I wish to refer primarily to the fundamental flaw in the Bill, to which several hon. Members alluded—the removal of further education institutions from local education authority funding and control. In addition, I shall make some remarks about adult education generally.

The glaring fault, the San Andreas fault, that runs through the Bill—I refer to the centralised control of further education colleges—can be justified neither in terms of past failure nor in terms of likely future improvement of organisation and provision. It cannot be said that under the local education authorities the further education system has failed to prosper. Indeed, it has prospered and been popular. There is no evidence at all that the further education colleges do not have the approval of their communities, and they have earned the commendation of Her Majesty's inspectorate—although perhaps, under the present Government, that is the kiss of death.

Nor can the polytechnics be cited as a precedent. Their removal from LEA control can be justified in terms of their role as national providers. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said much about that point. In any case, there are only 29 such colleges, plus, of course, the national colleges. They exist as a national network, have operated under the national advisory body and have developed their own internal structures. On the other hand, there are more than 500 institutions for the 16 to 19-year-olds. These are essentially local in orientation and provision, so there is no close parallel with the polytechnics; thus, the polytechnics should not be cited as a precedent. In that regard, therefore, there is not much justification for such a radical move.

What, then, are the likely consequences? Is there any justification there? Perhaps the change has overriding advantages. Will it, perhaps, result in greater coherence in strategic planning? Let me quote Hendon college:

> "School sixth formers will continue to exist side by side with the institutions in the newly formed post-16 sector and will be able to offer places to adults and part-time students. There is every potential that the new arrangements may lack coherence in terms of patterns of provision of education and training across the country, which must take into account local and regional, as well as national, imperatives."

Will good use be made of local knowledge and expertise? It is said:

> "It is proposed to remove all LEA reps from governing bodies. No good reason is put forward for this, and there are strong grounds to continue some representation to maintain links with the rest of the local education service, including

adult education, schools, the career service and the youth service. (And, indeed, also as the major employers within the area.)"

That is the view of Conservative-controlled London borough of Redbridge.

What about local accountability? Redbridge states:

"The removal of the colleges from the LEA sector will also remove the colleges from the local democratic accountability that they now have, replacing this by a body of governors which is, in effect, a self-perpetuating oligarchy."

These reforms are ill-judged, rushed and unwanted. They have no justification in terms of efficiency and national planning. Any justification can be based only on doctrinaire policies. As the Conservative leader of Hampshire county council said, it is "government by denigration".

The LEAs are left with the problem of coping with a system that separates 16 to 19-year-olds who are still in school, for whom they are responsible and who belong to a different network of provision from the majority of their cohorts. That is an administrative nightmare and young lives are being disadvantaged. We must consider also the fate of 16 to 19-year-olds who have chosen to go to sixth form colleges, which come under schools regulations and which are soon, according to the Bill, to come under further education regulations. I respectfully suggest that the Secretary of State and his Ministers take a closer look at the implications of the Bill for the 16 to 19-year-olds who are trapped on the wrong side of the tracks, or between the tracks.

Leisure courses, which are split off from adult vocational courses, are another major responsibility for LEAs. They are itemised in schedule 2. The LEAs will provide leisure courses on a discretionary basis by means of funding that is provided through revenue support. That means in effect that costs will be passed on to students. They will be pitched at levels that many clients can ill afford. As a result, the courses will not be viable. Accordingly, their range will be reduced drastically, and in many areas they will disappear.

Voluntary providers such as the Workers Educational Association, and many others, are limited in what they can do. They hope that they will be part-funded by the new funding councils, but they are uncertain about their relationship. If they are part-funded, they are certain that it will be to a level that will force them to pass costs on to students. The result will be similar to those that I have already described.

The comments of one or two clients are revealing. One course client wrote:

"My return to a more formal vocational education started by simply attending a ladies' keep fit class and a craft class. This was the first time since leaving school that I had taken up any form of learning. These classes, no matter how trivial or unimportant they are perceived to be by more learned people, were the stepping stones to my education."

I could read many letters of that sort.

Access is all-important and it is short-sighted to put adult education at such risk. The Bill puts adult learning under threat. The adult literacy and basic skills unit has been an important avenue for access to basic skills education. It has ranged from relatively informal adult education to a more formal approach. I approve of the inclusion of basic skills in schedule 2 as a statutory responsibility. It is an advance on the vagaries of discretionary LEA funding, which has often marginalised the work of the ALBSU. I am sure that there will be a positive response to that opportunity.

I make two pleas on behalf of the adult literacy and basic skills unit. First, the funding council should fund these courses on the basis of agreed standards and not on the basis of competition and market forces, to which they are not amenable. Secondly, the opportunity should be taken to free this part of education from the margins of funding by allocating a guaranteed proportion of funding to it that is more than the average of 1·5 per cent. of the present adult and further education budget.

A related issue is that specific provision should be made for students with special needs. There seems to be a dearth of references to that principle, which is well-established in the schools sector.

Another major means of access to formal further and higher education is the open college networks. Members of the open college network are a consortia of providers, which operate a national credit transfer framework and are subject to its processes of quality assurance. The open network accreditation provides a framework of rigorous validation. The accreditation processes require the identification of clear routes of progression as a condition of course recognition, but open college networks do not themselves provide courses. Perhaps, in Committee, Ministers will consider an amendment to clause 5, allowing a funding council to give financial support to an institution established by providers of further education for the purpose of operating credit accumulation and transfer arrangements related to the types of education set out in schedule 2—in other words, an open college network.

I see that I have run out of time. I ask Ministers to give serious consideration to parts of the Bill that merit further examination.

9.30 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): We have had an interesting opportunity to debate further and higher education. I suspect that, although we may have had many debates on higher education over the past decade or so, we have had few, if any, on further and adult education, and for that reason alone today's debate is welcome. It is interesting for another reason, however: we have heard a number of valedictory speeches today. I refer to the voluntary ones, although one or two may be in a different category. Several hon. Members have said that their speeches today will probably be their last in the House of Commons.

I have heard most of today's speeches. I have always enjoyed the contributions of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas)—who is not in the Chamber at present—to education debates. Those of us who served on the Standing Committee that considered the Education Reform Bill in 1988 welcomed his voice—a voice of freshness and difference—and it is sad to see him retire from the House and go to other pastures at such a young age. I say that with some feeling.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House will no doubt want to add to the comments that have been made about the final speech of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Sir R. Rhodes James). We will all have noted the substantial and significant contribution that he has made to our education debates over the years. He has introduced a voice of experience and learning: a voice from the academic world, which should be listened to and respected. I look forward to observing his continued work as a

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researcher and scholar, and I am sure that, in both capacities, he will continue to make a substantial contribution.

We shall miss the hon. Gentleman's contributions to education debates. It was characteristic of him to say that we should set up a non-party, apolitical committee to consider education issues. I am sure that that is the way in which he would approach such issues—although I tend to feel that such characteristics will not dominate our education debates over the next few weeks.

It would be remiss of the Opposition to suggest that we do not support parts of the Bill—and we shall support them in Committee, while trying to improve some elements. I refer in particular to the end of the binary divide. Let me echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and others in congratulating the polytechnics on the success that they have achieved so far. It would be churlish to argue about the nature and cause of that success. As the Minister has pointed out, I have a vested interest; let me simply congratulate the staff of the polytechnics. It is right that the divide between the two sets of higher education institutions should now be abolished.

However, that raises questions that need to be answered. My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) talked about the need to ensure quality of funding and treatment and to define the purpose of further and higher education, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) also referred. It is important that those issues are addressed. The hon. Member for Cambridge, who is now back in his place, made some important points about research and about the nature of the mission of higher education institutions.

To get the record correct, we must remind Conservative Members that it was the Labour party that tabled amendments to end the binary divide when we considered in Committee what became the Education Reform Act 1988. I was slightly amused earlier when the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) devoted at least eight minutes of his 10-minute speech to getting rid of the binary divide. I looked up the report of the 1988 Standing Committee and noticed that he voted against such a measure. One thing is clear—this may apply to other Conservative Members: time has moved on and perhaps Conservative Members now recognise the strength of new arguments, which have always been the Labour party's arguments. Nevertheless, we are glad that that divide is now to be abolished.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): We are winning them over.

Mr. Fatchett: Indeed, we win them over bit by bit, but unfortunately that process will not go on for much longer —*[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friends say, we are winning the intellectual argument bit by bit, and that will certainly continue, but unfortunately we shall be unable to win over sufficient numbers of Conservative Members because there will not be so many of them when we return after the election—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends are right; I personalise these things too much. I should not worry about redundant Conservative Members because they usually do very well.

I hope that the Minister of State will give us some reassurance on an important point tonight because it is a matter on which we shall seek to table amendments in Committee. I refer to the higher education institutions that had been preparing for polytechnic status, such as Luton, Derby, Southampton, Bolton, Cheltenham and Gloucester. Those institutions now seem to be at the other side of a new binary divide, providing high quality education that has been approved by the Council for National Academic Awards. They are doing good work, but are unable to be part of the new funding council, as they wish. An artificial divide has been created. The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) knows one such institute and the pressures that it faces. These institutions should be given the opportunity to obtain university status if that is what they wish. I look forward to the Minister of State giving us an assurance on that either tonight or in Committee. I advise him that, despite the limited amount of time that will be available for any form of debate in Standing Committee, we shall seek to amend the Bill to give those institutions the rights that are enjoyed by other institutions.

The contentious part of the Bill is that dealing not with higher education, but with further education. It was clear from his speech that the Secretary of State could not find much support for his measures. He has no mandate. The Bill was not part of the election manifesto on which Conservative Members fought the last election.

It is also clear that there is no support for the Bill among the local authorities or those who commented on the White Paper last year. The Secretary of State did not follow the practice of his right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), the current Home Secretary, who, when he was Secretary of State for Education and Science, published the responses to the White Paper that led to the Education Reform Act. The current Secretary of State did not do so. It is interesting to believe that the Home Secretary is the champion of open government while the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) likes to keep things under wraps. Having analysed what Conservative authorities have said, it is clear that there is no support for the provisions among the Conservative shire counties, the very bodies which, as has been pointed out, will be asked to knock on doors and to canvass support for the Conservative party in the next few weeks.

Let us start with Essex—many would say that there is no better place to start. Let us begin by considering the comments of Essex county council which is not, by any means, a Labour authority. It said:

> "The White Paper's proposals failed to make a convincing case why FE Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges are to be removed from local authority control."

So there is no support there.

Then we go to Surrey, the local education authority of the right hon. Member for Mole Valley. One would have thought that with his persuasive charm he could have influenced Conservative Members. What was the response? It said that the proposals were

> "without any reasonable explanation or justification."

Again, no support.

The third example is from the west midlands. It is Hereford and Worcester LEA, one which has always been a little troublesome to the Government and whose members have been prepared to defend local government. The local authority made a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) made earlier. It pointed out that, in order to establish some local knowledge, the further education funding council would have to establish regional committees and that those regional committees would cover 5·2 million people. It said:

> "The needs and aspirations of its 5·2 million inhabitants require something more than a regional committee of 12 or so members, none of whom will be democratically representative of the community nor will they be accountable to that community for their actions."

Is not the crucial argument that the Government have taken out of democratic control such an important service as further education and are placing it in the hands of an unaccountable, undemocratic bureaucracy? In so doing, they face opposition from not only Labour but Conservative local education authorities.

Why are the Government centralising and nationalising the further education colleges? One argument may simply be that which the Secretary of State used in his statement in March last year. He said that Britain lagged behind its competitors. It was an interesting statement because it recognised that the Government had been in office for 11 years and Britain still lagged behind in post-16 education and training provision. That point was recognised by Lord Belstead in the Second Reading debate in the other place. He said:

> "I would not stand before your Lordships today and say that participation rates in further education after the age of 16 are entirely as they should be".—[*Official Report, House of Lords;* 21 November 1991, c. 1022.]

That was a Minister talking about his Government's record. It is a record of failure recognised by the Secretary of State and by a Minister in the Department of Education and Science.

Mr. Turner: And by the Select Committee.

Mr. Fatchett: And by the Select Committee, as my hon. Friend says.

If there is a reason for that failure, it is not that the further education colleges are at fault. The reason is the failure of the Government to give any direction, meaning or leadership in post-16 education and training in Britain. For a decade we have lived with the short-change, quick-fix approach to post-16 training. The Government have seen youth training as a means not of providing vocational qualifications and easy access to qualifications for the labour market but of massaging the unemployment figures. That is why they claim now that they have achieved some improvements in staying-on rates.

But the only way that the Government can point to an improvement is by including youth training—a scheme that is discredited by European standards and gives only a quarter of those who enter it any valid and marketable qualification. That is the record of the Government. Incidentally, it is a record which shows itself in another way. The Secretary of State says that he has now discovered further education and post-16 education as a priority. Perhaps he has not looked at his Department's record. In the past three years, that record shows that the investment per student from 1987 to 1990—these are the Government's own figures—fell by 10 per cent. in real terms. The Government have not invested in further education.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Those are ridiculous figures.

Mr. Fatchett: They are the Government's figures.

Mr. Clarke: I am sorry, I did not intend to put the hon. Gentleman off. He used a ridiculous figure which shows the worthwhile advance in reducing unit costs. He then said in the next phrase that those figures showed that we had failed to invest. The record over the past three years is of rapid increases in investment and enormous increases in the number of students. The hon. Gentleman uses the stupid statistics which the Opposition constantly use to denigrate a programme of rapid extra investment in education.

Mr. Fatchett: I should have thought that even this Secretary of State could have done better than that. When talking of schools, the Secretary of State likes to use the figures per pupil. When it comes to colleges, he has to use other terms. As he knows, there has been a cut in the level of investment per student in the college sector.

The Government have failed further education, have failed to provide leadership and have now introduced a measure which is simply aimed at centralising and giving more power to the Secretary of State. The measure is against the wishes of the Government's friends in local government.

However, the further education provisions are crucial to the nature of the Bill because the Government have never seen the consequences of their actions. The worst of those consequences will be the Bill's effect on the adult education service, which is a matter of pride for students, for local education authorities and for those who work in the service. Indeed, the hon. Member for Tiverton (Sir R. Maxwell-Hyslop) argued strongly about that aspect of the Bill, mentioning the link with the community in terms of pre-16 and post 16-year-old students and adults and the impact of the Bill on education provision and the life of a community.

The Bill will put adult education at risk throughout the country. When the Secretary of State was asked to justify the new system, he said that it was neat, it was tidy and that it would work. Then we went into some of the details and the various layers in the bureaucracy. There will be a bid to a further education college in the hope that funding will be available. If it is not available, there will be a bid to the further education funding council. If the money is not available there, the college will have to go to the local education authority.

Is it not nonsense for the Government to believe that local education authorities—stripped of their further education functions, and colleges, rate-capped and under great pressure because of the poll tax in many areas—will pick up the tab from central Government to fund adult education? Have not the Government given a clear message to every local education authority that the Government value vocational adult education but not non-vocational adult education? The division does not exist intellectually or in practice, but the Government want to hold to that division because they believe that it will save money when providing adult education services.

If my hon. Friends are in any way doubtful about what will happen to the adult education service, let them look at the record of what has happened in Conservative-controlled local education authorities in the past few years. When they have been under pressure to keep down the poll tax, what service has been cut more than any other? It will always be the non-mandatory, discretionary services. In

[Mr. Fatchett]

Warwickshire, it was the virtual abolition of the youth service—written out by the Conservative local education authority.

Mr. Pawsey: That is a gross exaggeration. The youth service in Warwickshire will still attract a budget of more than £450,000 and the county council does not propose to sell off any buildings or plant. So the youth service remains. Warwickshire county council wishes to involve the voluntary sector more in its proposal.

Mr. Fatchett: That was probably one of the weakest defences that I have heard. I am glad that I will never be in a position to have to employ the hon. Gentleman as a counsel in my defence because, as he knows, Warwickshire is basically opting out of its responsibilities for a youth service.

We also know that throughout the country Conservative-controlled LEAs have cut back on adult education, because it is a discretionary service and they see the oppportunity to save money in that area.

The Government offer one hope to the millions of people who look to the adult education service—that local authorities which are squeezed, in Tory areas against adult education, will then pick up the bill and maintain the service. The hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) was right to raise the issue. It is important and it will not go away. In Committee, we shall push the Government further because we want guarantees to ensure that the adult education service survives.

There is no educational or democratic justification for taking further education colleges out of local education authority control. The Bill came about for one reason—to massage the poll tax and to save the face of Conservative Members. They are so deeply worried and embarrassed by the weakness of their arguments that they are not prepared to spend time in Committee to defend them. They are running away from the argument. Parents have no confidence in the Government's provision of education. The Government have lost the confidence of parents and they have lost confidence in their own arguments. After this Bill, they will be on the way to defeat at the next election. The Bill will be a further nail in their electoral coffin.

9.40 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): We have had an interesting debate which has been dominated by distinguished ex-lecturers and the ex-teachers on the Opposition Benches. We have enjoyed the quality of their arguments.

I do not have a lot of time, but I shall try to deal with the points raised by Labour Members and my hon. Friends. It is fair to say that there has been a consensus in welcoming the higher education provisions in the Bill.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) raised a couple of items that were still of concern to him. The first related to the condition of grant under clauses 68 and 81. I assure my right hon. Friend that the condition of grant under the Bill, as amended, may not relate to the appointment of particular staff, to the admission of particular students or to the duration of particular courses. The power of direction in clause 81 is an important long-stop power for the Secretary of State to protect taxpayers' interests.

Although the wording of the clause may not be clear as my right hon. Friend would like, it is the result of extensive discussions in another place. It is unlikely that, however much oil is burned between now and Report, we would find a clearer form of words that would be more acceptable to all. We now have the complete agreement of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to that wording.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) raised the issue of the quality assessment committees of the funding council. Those committees will consist of a majority of independent members, and the assessment staff will largely be former members of Her Majesty's inspectorate. It is extremely unlikely, to put it gently, that their judgment will be affected in any way by the fact that they are working for the funding council rather than Her Majesty's inspectorate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Sir R. Rhodes James) and the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Carr) asked about the funding of pure and strategic research in higher educational institutions. It is accepted that applied research is intended to be essentially self-financing. We do not intend to make specific resources available for its support. I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge that the dividing line between applied and pure research is not perhaps as simple

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) made the important point that the allocation of funds between new and existing university institutions should be on a basis of departmental, rather than institutional, performance. I completely agree with him, and we intend to proceed in that way.

I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge on his contribution. While we of course regret his departure from this place, I look forward to reading an increased output from his pen. I have greatly enjoyed the books that he has produced over the last 15 years or so. I recall, before coming to this place, attending a small party political meeting not far from the House which he addressed on the subject of the way forward for a future Conservative Government. It was the most stimulating and original presentation that I had heard during the late 1970s. I appreciate, as an individual, how effective he can be as a communicator and lecturer. Lucky indeed are his future students.

The subject of further education has dominated the debate. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State explained clearly the broad thrust of the Government's policies and the main features of the Bill. It is worth repeating that we are freeing FE colleges from local authority control and giving them a powerful incentive, through the new funding regime, to recruit additional students.

FE college funding will be student-led, and colleges will be rewarded for attracting increased numbers. In that way they will have every incentive to respond to local needs and demands and to expand participation locally in the way that they think is best for their communities. They will be the masters of their own destinies, to the benefit of their students, local employers and the country as a whole. Far from centralisation, as those on the Opposition Bench have charged, the Bill is about putting the decision-taking powers where they belong—with colleges at a very local level so that they can respond to local needs.

Some of my hon. Friends expressed concern about the effect of the Bill on adult provision in certain parts of the country. One was my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel). I see in his place my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who has not been able to speak in the debate, but I know of his concern about what is the almost unique position of Richmond adult and community college. It is widely recognised that that is an excellent college which serves the local community well. I am well aware of the concerns felt in Richmond about the future of the college, and I wish to put them at rest.

As my hon. Friends know, Richmond college is not included automatically in the Bill's provisions which govern the funding of FE colleges by the new funding council, but should the college wish, it can apply to be funded directly by the FE funding council. The means is through incorporation under clause 16, a provision expressly designed to cover cases such as Richmond college.

Clause 16 would not be in the Bill had we not expected colleges like Richmond to want the option of taking advantage of it. It would not be there if we did not expect the funding council to be willing to propose to the Secretary of State that such colleges should be funded as part of the new sector. I see no reason why the Secretary of State would turn down such a proposal from the funding council.

However, as I said in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes, the decision is for Richmond college alone. If it decides not to apply under clause 16, it is also covered by clause 6(5). It can have all its provision on the funding council side considered for funding by the council by applying through an FE college. The regional committee will have an important role to play in advising the council on such an application. If Richmond college were dissatisfied with the handling of its application, it has a right to turn to the Secretary of State. All those who use Richmond college should be aware that there is no reason to believe that the Bill will harm the further education of adults in Richmond or elsewhere.

My hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton (Sir R. Maxwell-Hyslop) and for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) in particular raised the issue of community colleges. Those are important in many parts of the country and we want them to flourish. That is why we introduced clause 6(5), which enables community colleges to apply through FE colleges for schedule 2 provision. The FE colleges must then forward the application to the council where they believe that provision would otherwise be inadequate in the area. That relates to the overall provision in an area, not the provision to be made by the FE colleges themselves.

If the FE college does not forward the bid, the council can intervene and, together with its regional advisory committee, it will need to understand the circumstances of each locality in the country. The council and committees will need to pay particular attention to the accessibility of provision and the role of community colleges. I assure my hon. Friends that, through guidance to the further education funding councils and advisory committees, we shall ensure that they do just that. We should also remember that the Secretary of State may review the decisions of FE colleges and of the council on grounds of unreasonableness or failure to perform a duty. Taken together, those are substantial safeguards for the continued support of schedule 2 provision in community colleges.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton spoke about timing. May I reassure him about that? The timing for colleges applying under clause 6(5) will be the same as for colleges within the new sector. The council will lay down a timetable for applications and ensure that there is plenty of time for those applications to pass through the sponsoring FE college and, where necessary, for an appeals procedure. There is no reason why that cannot be dealt with in the normal annual timetable for determining public expenditure, and we shall take steps to make it absolutely certain that those timing requirements are made widely known not just to LEAs but to community providers.

The remarkable aspect of this debate is that, after about five hours, the House is still no clearer about the Labour party's policy on further education. The sum total of our knowledge is that Labour Members favour giving further education colleges corporate status as an extension of their local management, but want local authorities to fund the colleges and to retain a major role in planning. They have not answered the most elementary questions.

Would the Labour party incorporate all colleges, or would there be criteria for incorporation? If so, what criteria would there be? We did not know at the start of the debate; we do not know now. Indeed, it is not clear from Labour's proposals what the point of incorporation is. Labour Members say that they want to make no accompanying changes to funding. In that case, why on earth do they want to introduce incorporation? What is the point of setting up FE colleges as independent, legal entities when they have no more control over their decisions and funding than they have at present and when Labour Members want power to remain, as at present, with LEAs?

Let us look at the performance of Labour-controlled LEAs. Sandwell LEA set about trying to destroy what is widely recognised to be an excellent and highly regarded FE college. Now the LEA has announced out of the blue that it wants to cut £2·8 million off Sandwell college's budget for next year. The LEA and the Labour party say that that is all part of strategic planning. I call it strategic victimisation. They are strategically seeking to benefit the LEA at the expense of an excellent FE college.

Let us see what is happening in Labour-controlled Birmingham. Many people there believe that the LEA has deliberately operated a system designed to keep the Birmingham colleges in deficit. Now the council has apparently announced that it will withhold a further £1 million that it was planned to distribute before the end of March for reasons which, according to the city's chief executive as reported in the local press, include

> "A visit to a Government Minister by representatives of Sutton college to complain about the authority".

Another reason is

> "Governors from one college calling in financial consultants to challenge the authority's distribution of funds."

That is the reality of local Labour LEA control of good FE colleges. At the very moment when the countries of eastern

[Mr. Tim Eggar]

Europe are ditching the dead hand of socialist interference and strategic planning, we see it alive, well and working in Labour LEAs like Birmingham.

One of the most interesting things has been the letters that we have had from FE colleges in Labour-controlled areas, explaining the kind of mechanisms that Labour LEAs have used to control FE colleges. Some of the devices

"used by my own Labour authority to do this are as follows: they issue the authorised delegated budget late in the financial year and ensure that it is substantially cut from the draft budget which is indicated at the start of the year. At the final outturn the LEA refuses to accept all of the recharges made against it for fees, examination fees, block grants, mandatory awards, etcetera."

In other words, the reality of Labour-controlled LEAs is what has driven so many FE principals and governing bodies to welcome the proposals. They recognise the reality of Labour LEA control. An overwhelming two thirds of FE principals deliberately want to follow our proposal.

The Labour party is taking the same attitude to choice with further education colleges as it takes to parental choice. What it wants is control by Labour LEAs. It wants socialist dictation and socialist planning. That is what we reject in this Bill, and that is why I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to support it.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 206.

Division No. 77] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew

Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Farr, Sir John
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, Tony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION *[Lords]*

[Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required by a Minister of the Crown—

(a) for making grants to any of the following bodies established by the Act, that is, the Further Education Funding Council for England, the Further Education Funding Council for Wales, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and

(b) for defraying his administrative expenses under the Act, and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion relating to Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]* (Allocation of Time) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry to delay you and the House but today 15,000 unarmed Kashmiris sought to cross the border from Azad Kashmir into Indian-occupied Kashmir. They were turned back by Pakistani authorities and one person has been killed. The organisers are planning to resume their march tomorrow and, through you, Mr. Speaker, I ask the Government to pass on a message to the Governments of India and Pakistan, urging that maximum restraint is shown tomorrow when these unarmed Kashmiris again demonstrate their desire for self-determination, freedom and the unity of Kashmir.

Mr. Speaker: That point of order has nothing to do with the next debate, but I am sure that what the hon. Gentleman has said will have been heard by those on the Government Front Bench.

Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]* (Allocation of Time)

10.17 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:—

Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House on or before 26th February 1992.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on 26th February may continue until 9.30 pm., whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 27th February.

2.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated—

(a) shall meet on 18th, 19th, 20th, 25th and 26th February; and

(b) on each of those days shall sit at half-past Ten o'clock and half-past Four o'clock.

(2) The proceedings to be taken on each of those sittings shall be as shown in the second column, and shall be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the third column, of the following Table:—

TABLE

Sitting	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
1st	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2	—
2nd	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
3rd	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
4th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
5th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
6th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
7th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
8th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	Midnight
9th	Remaining proceedings	—
10th	Remaining proceedings so far as not disposed of	9.30 p.m.

Report and Third Reading

3. The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

Procedure in Standing Committee

4.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until the proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a member of the Government, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the member who moves, and from a member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

5. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which Clauses, Schedules, new Clauses and new Schedules are taken in the Standing Committee.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

6. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

7. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be moved in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time on allotted days

8. If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Private Business

9. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

10.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed to the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or that Motion is made by a member of the Government;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the beginning to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(4) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

11.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a Member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

12. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which this Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by this Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

13.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation etc.

14.—(1) In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*.

(2) Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) and Standing Order No. 103 (Business sub-committees) shall not apply to this Order.

The House knows that we have a full programme involving both Houses in a great deal of work this Session, so it is essential to manage the programme in such a way as to ensure the orderly progression of Bills through their various stages. This timetable motion is part of that process.

I made it clear in my evidence to the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), that I support—I am speaking personally—the much wider use of timetable motions for Government Bills, particularly in their Committee stages. I am much encouraged to see that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) agreed with that. I understand that most of the evidence to my right hon. Friend's Committee on that point favours the timetabling of Bills.

The purpose of the timetable motion is to structure the debate in Committee—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Would hon. Members who are below the Gangway come into the Chamber or leave, please?

Mr. MacGregor: The purpose of the timetable motion——

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Will the Lord President confirm that my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has never supported the introduction of a guillotine on the proceedings of a Bill without any agreement with the Opposition? He has not done so either in his evidence to the Committee or on the Floor of the House.

Mr. MacGregor: What I have said before in the House is that the hon. Member for Copeland supports the principle of the timetabling of Bills. I spoke about the

[Mr. MacGregor]

much wider use of timetable motions. I referred not to this one but to the principle. I hope that the Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale will put proposals to the House that we can then debate.

The purpose of the timetable motion is to structure the debate during the Committee stage to ensure that sufficient time is devoted to all the elements requiring detailed consideration. It is in line with the precedent of the timetable motion on the Local Government Finance Bill, which is generally held to have worked well and provided for effective consideration of the Bill.

I am very pleased that, in so far as it is possible, we have been able, through the usual channels, to accommodate the wishes of the Opposition on the allocation of time to different parts of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science, acceded to Opposition requests that 80 per cent. of the time available in Committee should be spent on clauses 1 to 14, which deal with further education funding councils. I understand perfectly well why that should be so, as the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made clear in the Second Reading debate his support for the higher education reforms, which account for quite a large part of the bulk of the latter part of the Bill. I hope that this allocation reflects the wishes of the House as a whole. As was made clear in the debate today, there is agreement—on both sides, I think—on the latter parts of the Bill dealing with higher education, although here, too, we are providing reasonable time for consideration in Committee.

The Bill has been given extensive consideration in another place—a total of about 65 hours, including four days in Committee and three days on Report. The time that this timetable motion provides for the Committee stage will be ample for consideration of the issues that the House as a whole has shown it wishes to raise. The timetable provides for a minimum—I stress that it is a minimum—of 50 hours in Committee, and the Committee may go beyond that if it wishes to do so.

Another issue is the need for speedy processing of the Bill. That reflects two things—first, the shortened nature of this parliamentary Session, giving rise to the need to proceed with our Bills in an orderly way through Committee if we are to dispose of as many of them as possible; and, secondly, the importance that we attach to this Bill, which is symbolic of the high priority that we give to the reform of further education, as well as higher education.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): As the passing of the Bill is being given such high priority, will the Leader of the House guarantee that all the evidence will be put before the Committee—that some of it will not be suppressed, as the Secretary of State suppressed evidence put forward by colleges of further education?

Mr. MacGregor: Having heard the exchanges earlier today, I do not think that there has been any suppression. Certainly, I know that in very many colleges of further education there is substantial support for what the Bill seeks to do.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): I appeal to the Leader of the House to ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science to do what he has been asked repeatedly, during and before the debate, to do—publish the survey information that has been sent to him by colleges of further education. It is as simple as that. If the Secretary of State for Education and Science does not want to be charged with the suppression of evidence, the Leader of the House should appeal to him to come clean, go public and reveal the evidence.

Mr. MacGregor: I certainly know of further education colleges that are very enthusiastic about the Bill and whose one concern is that it may not complete its passage during the current Session. That is why we are discussing the motion. We are providing ample Committee time for consideration of evidence of the type about which the hon. Gentleman is talking.

It is vital that we should not lose the momentum on these important reforms. There is a great demand from universities, polytechnics, further education colleges and sixth form colleges to implement the reforms as quickly as possible so that we may avoid the damaging effect on morale that delays and uncertainties could cause. The sooner the funding councils are started up and are able to discuss detailed formulae and arrangements for the distribution of funds to institutions of higher education and institutions of further education, the better.

The Bill also means big changes for further education and sixth form colleges. They, too, need to know without delay where they stand so that they can prepare to work in and with the new structures and make their own bids for funds. It is essential that these councils are set up as soon as possible so that they may start work on all the detailed arrangements and consultations that will be necessary if a smooth transition to the new funding system is to be ensured. As I am constantly told by many who get in touch with me, uncertainty and delay would be damaging to the whole of the further and higher education sector. That is why it is essential that we make progress with the Bill as quickly as possible, consistent with proper discussion and consultation—not so much consultation as consideration —in the House. *[Interruption.]* At this point it is consideration in the House. I readily acknowledge the need for time to debate the Bill in Committee. I believe that the timetable that we are proposing offers a sensible and balanced way of achieving all the different objectives, including the legitimate desire of the House to consider the Bill fully, and I commend it to the House.

10.24 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): There is a small part of me that feels that, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I should welcome what the Leader of the House has said. As we all know, it is a matter of only a few weeks before the joyous day when the boot will be on the other foot and the right hon. Gentleman will be sitting on the Opposition Front Bench making speeches on timetable motions. Part of me thinks that he is setting a useful precedent.

The right hon. Gentleman has explained how important it is that the rights of the Opposition should be restricted. Apparently, it is a mistake to spend too many hours discussing a Bill. When the time comes, as it certainly will, for a Labour Government to introduce quite a lot of progressive legislation that the country desperately needs, I have no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends will wish to oppose it. He will not really be able to do that, however, because he will be obliged to stand at the Opposition Dispatch Box and commend any guillotine motion that we bring before the House on the basis that the Labour Government are faithfully following the precedent of 13 years of Tory government.

The Leader of the House may not operate in quite that way. I think that he will learn the tactics of Opposition rapidly. I hope that he learns them well, because he will need to deploy them for a long time.

Let me make it crystal clear—I have done it before and I do not mind doing it again—that I do not have any fundamental or irrevocable objections to timetable motions. I do not know whether I speak for all my right hon. and hon. Friends. The Leader of the House was right to say that there were many who said, in giving evidence to the Committee which he set up, that they think it right that Bills should be the subject of timetables.

However, the right hon. Gentleman completely misrepresented the position of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who has been quoted, by implying that we, the Opposition, would be happy if timetable motions were introduced without any attempt to secure an agreement on what the timetable should be, and without any reciprocal arrangement that improved the rights of the Opposition. There are many ways in which that could be done. When there is a Labour Government and the Leader of the House finds himself sitting on the Opposition Benches, that Administration will be gracious to the then Opposition. We shall discuss ways in which the rights of the Opposition can be observed. It is—*[Interruption.]* Some of my hon. Friends are not as generous as I would be prepared to be.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): My hon. Friend talks about rights. I ask him to remember that there are the rights of the Opposition and the rights of those outside the House, who ought to have the opportunity to influence our decisions. This guillotine motion will make it extremely difficult for those outside to make representations to those who consider the Bill in Committee following its Second Reading. When my hon. Friend is discussing rights, I ask him to accept that it should be emphasised that a guillotine gags Parliament and many others outside.

Mr. Grocott: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. He and I think that consideration should be given to allowing Committees to bring people before them to give evidence on a Bill during its passage through Parliament. Many reforms are possible, and a new and reforming Government will consider them all.

Whatever our views on guillotine motions, one or two matters must be put on the record. All Governments use guillotines, but no Government have used them with the frequency of this Administration. No Government have used similar means. The figures that I am about to present to the House will embarrass the Leader of the House, but I shall get them on the record none the less.

The right hon. Gentleman has answered one or two questions on the frequency of the Government's use of the guillotine procedure. Indeed, he answered such a question on 8 November 1991. I am sure that this was inadvertent—perhaps the wording of the question was not as precise as it should have been—but the answer did not begin to present an accurate picture of the number of times that guillotine motions have been brought before the House by the Government. I am sure that hon. Members will not mind if I put one or two statistics on the record. To be fair—after all, if I do not do it, I am sure that someone else will—I shall go back to the time of the last Labour Government.

In the period of five years and two months between February 1974 and May 1979, a Labour Government introduced 20 guillotine motions. In a four-year Parliament, the 1979-83 Tory Government introduced 19. In another four-year Parliament, the 1983-87 Tory Government introduced 17. In four years and eight months, the current Government have introduced 35. The Leader of the House may want to check that, and put his own figures right to make sure that the record is straight. Let me give the details: it will take about 30 seconds.

Let us start with 1987. Three guillotine motions were tabled for discussion of the Bill that became the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Should we not remind the House that that legislation was supposed to stand the test of time? Because it was rushed through, another piece of legislation is now needed to put matters right. Is that not a very good illustration of the problems to which misuse of the guillotine to ram legislation through the House and the country can lead? In this instance, a second Bill has had to be presented, and most people in the education system have found themselves in a mess in the intervening three years.

Mr. Grocott: My hon. Friend has made a powerful point. Exactly the same is true of the Government's shambolic efforts in regard to local government finance.

Between 1987 and now, there were guillotine motions on the following: the Local Government Finance Bill two; the Social Security Bill one; the Firearms (Amendment) Bill two; the School Boards (Scotland) Bill; the Housing Bill; the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill; the Water Bill two; the Official Secrets Bill two; the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Bill two; the Dock Work Bill; the Football Spectators Bill; the Children Bill; the Companies Bill; the Local Government and Housing Bill; the Employment Bill; the National Health Service and Community Care Bill two; the Social Security Bill two; the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Bill one; the Education (Student Loans) Bill; the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill; the Dangerous Dogs Bill two; the Local Government Finance Bill; the Education (Schools) Bill; the Further and Higher Education Bill—which we are now discussing—one. According to my arithmetic that adds up to 35 guillotine motions, which is unprecedented in modern times—indeed, ever, so far as I can judge.

I do not know why the Leader of the House bothers with his Committees, given that he has apparently introduced a major constitutional innovation without any agreement from them. Not only are guillotine motions being introduced with phenomenal frequency; they are being introduced at a very early stage. Let us take the last five for which the right hon. Gentleman has been responsible. The guillotine motion on the Community Charges (General Reduction) Bill was introduced on 26 March last year, before any Commitee debate had taken place. The motion on the Dangerous Dogs Bill was introduced on 10 June last year—again, before any such debate had taken place. The motion on the Local

[Mr. Grocott]

Government Finance Bill—which set a record—was also introduced before debate had begun. The Education (Schools) Bill motion was a minor improvement on the Government's previous record; it was introduced on Report and Third Reading. The current guillotine motion, however, has been introduced without any attempt to decide whether it was necessary.

The Government have used the guillotine in a way that no other Government have—with alarming frequency and absolute severity. They have imposed their will on the House. Despite having a huge majority in the past five years of over 100 Members, they have still felt the need to do what, until he became a member of one, Lord Hailsham used to describe as playing the game of being an "elective dictatorship". That is the way in which the Government have operated.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): It happens to be worse than that—*[Interruption.]* Oh, it is. I smell a rat here—I really do. The Secretary of State for Education and Science sits on the Treasury Bench, treating us over this Bill just as he did when he was Secretary of State for Health. I remember the time when you and I, Mr. Speaker, had a few words because of what was happening because of the Secretary of State for Health—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Oh yes, I remember it well and I am sure that you do, Mr. Speaker. I apologised to you anyway—*[Interruption.]* Sherwood can shut up. The important thing is the rat, which is the question of the report on the survey——

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Haynes: The Secretary of State need not shake his head. He is ducking out of his responsibilities as Secretary of State for Education and Science, just as he did on health. On top of all that, he is rushing everything through to deny us the report on that survey. It is a shocking state of affairs, and the Secretary of State should be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Grocott: My hon. Friend raises a point that has been raised many times before. Perhaps he should have directed his appeal directly to honest John sitting opposite me on the Treasury Bench, who may well be able to persuade his fellow member of Cabinet that he should——

Mr. Haynes: I am glad that my hon. Friend has given way again, because it is some time since I smelt a rat in the Chamber, but there is one knocking about tonight. The Secretary of State should come clean. I do not know what the people back in Rushcliffe think about him when he messes about in this way. He messed around with health, and look at the mess we are in. Now he is messing around with education, and look at the mess that that will be in. It has got to stop. The people will decide in not many weeks' time. I know that I will not be here, Mr. Speaker—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] The right hon. and learned Gentleman, the Leader of the House and all those on the Treasury Bench know that the people outside will not stand for this kind of activity—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State is supposed to be listening. That is how he ducks out of his responsibilities and will not come clean—*[Interruption.]* Now I shall sit down.

Mr. Speaker: Is this an intervention or a speech? *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Grocott: Sadly, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) will not be with us after the election, but my experience of him suggests that if he opens his mouth in Ashfield, we shall hear him down here——

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall hear it.

Mr. Grocott: The details of the timetable motion allow for just five days' debate on a Bill which is 103 pages long, contains 94 clauses and nine schedules and which must report back to the House by 26 February. I have listened to fair chunks of the debate tonight, and there can be no doubt whatsoever that considerable complexities need sorting out, many of which have been raised by Conservative Members. I am sure that they need the time to debate the Bill just as much as anyone else.

I ask a simple question to which I know that there is a simple answer, but I still think that it is worth a little time to discover it: why are the Government in such a desperate hurry to get the Bill back to the House on 26 February? I offer one or two possible explanations in an attempt to be generous to the Government. Is it, for example—this could be one reason—because a clear manifesto commitment must be fulfilled, so Conservative Members feel obliged to rush the Bill through at the end of the Parliament?

I have searched through the last Conservative party manifesto. There are many references in it. There is a copy here if Members want to browse through it in the small hours of morning. Perhaps they will find a section that I have missed. There are lots of references to bringing the crime rate down, economic miracles and all sorts of things like that. But I can see no reference whatever to the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*. So there is no possible justification for introducing the guillotine motion on the ground of an election commitment.

The second possibility is that the Government have moved the guillotine motion on the ground that an inordinate amount of time has already been spent debating the Bill. We have already answered that point. Of course that is not the case: we have not even reached the Committee stage, so the guillotine motion cannot have been introduced on those grounds.

A further possibility is that the guillotine motion has been tabled because massive opposition to the Bill is anticipated. This is a more difficult one to answer. Of course there is strong opposition to some parts of the Bill, to which many of my hon. Friends have drawn the attention of the Minister, but it also has to be said that, perhaps unusually for Government legislation, there is a large part of the Bill on which there is a wide measure of agreement. That is the part which deals with the ending of the binary system in higher education.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): That is Labour party policy.

Mr. Grocott: As my hon. Friend says, that is Labour party policy. But better than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I am sure that you will allow 30 seconds indulgence here—I remind Conservative Members, although they were not all present at the time, of a Bill introduced way back in 1976, if we can have a trip down memory lane. I have not checked the Division list closely but some Conservative Members present tonight were here then. I know that the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) was not here at the time, and he will not be with us much longer, but many Members who are present tonight were here then.

I draw the attention of the House to 18 May 1976, when the Comprehensive Higher Education Bill was introduced under the ten-minute Bill procedure. Modesty prevents me from spelling out which Member introduced it. The motion was:

> "That leave be given to bring in a Bill to end distinctions between the various types of educational institutions that cater for people over 18 years of age, and to provide for a genuinely comprehensive system of higher education under democratic control."—[*Official Report*, 18 May 1976; Vol. 911, c. 1227.]

That was not too bad but, like most ideas ahead of their time, I am afraid that it was voted down by 182 votes to 170. On checking through the Division list, I found that among the Members who sadly threw out that advanced piece of legislation were the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) and other interesting names. I do not have time to check them all.

If the Leader of the House had had the foresight in those early days to see the merit in that legislation, he would not have felt it necessary tonight to move a savage guillotine motion to curtail debate on the measure. That fine piece of legislation would have long since passed into law and we would have had lots of time to spend on Opposition days, motions of censure and other matters on which we could spend our time much more effectively.

So it will not do to say that the reason why the Government found it necessary to curtail debate on the Bill was that they felt that there would be massive opposition to it. There is a whole section of the Bill on which there is a great deal of agreement. We all know why the Government want the Bill back by 26 February. They want it back by then because, on 10 March, they will have a quick fix Budget and then, some time after, if all goes according to plan from their view, they will fix a quick-fix election on 9 April. That is what it is all about.

I would not have minded the motion tonight quite so much if it had been given an honest title, such as the General Election (Clearing the Decks) Motion, or whatever title the Leader of the House wanted to give it. He has this "honest John" face but sometimes he betrays what he is thinking. I thought he looked weary as he presented the timetable motion. It is so similar to the language that he used on previous timetable motions that I do not know why he does not take a tape and mime to it. There is no doubt about it—he knows perfectly well the reason why he is introducing this guillotine motion.

However, the Government are still feeling some degree of nervousness. The timetable might not operate this time. After all, the Prime Minister has run away from three election dates. He was all set to go last spring, and he ran away. He was all set to go in the summer, and he ran away. He was set to go in the autumn, but he did not run away from that one—he got the editors of five friendly newspapers to run away for him. Opposition Members desperately hope that he will not run away this time. Let us hope that for once he will stand up and be counted and go down fighting—as go down he assuredly will. Let us have no more of these silly guillotine motions. Let us have a general election.

10.45 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): I feel uneasy about this guillotine motion. I have felt increasingly uneasy about such motions in recent months. It seems that we all spend far too little time examining legislation closely. We all know the problem: we legislate too much, and that must apply to all of us.

I became a Member of the House in 1983 on a promise from various people that we would legislate less, that we did not want to legislate all the time, and that we would examine matters more carefully. However, as soon as I got here I realised that we were on a treadmill of legislation. Legislation from the various great Departments of State was pushed upon the House. I think that I am not alone in saying that I have not properly done my job of examining in detail some of the legislation which has come before us.

I wish that we would legislate less and would spend more time considering what we do. This may be my last utterance in the House before the next general election, but I hope to be back—although that is not a matter for me. I would tell any future House of Commons to study legislation more carefully and to legislate less.

This is an important Bill, relating to adult education. How many thousands of millions of people in our constituencies are concerned about this issue? In November last I raised, in an Adjournment debate, the question of adult education in Croydon and Mr. Speaker was in the Chair because of his great interest in the subject. My right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) was also here. In that debate I was able to say that in Croydon in 1991 there were more than 40,000 enrolments for higher education, representing 20,000 to 30,000 students. So many people have an interest in this topic and would therefore expect us to spend a good amount of time on it.

Unless I have read the guillotine motion incorrectly, it seems that the time available to discuss clause 15 through to the end of the Bill amounts to about a day. Yet the Bill contains about 90 clauses, some of which are very important. It is not for me to suggest ways in which the Bill should be improved now; that is a matter for another day. However, clause 28 is important. It relates to the crucial argument about whether continuing education and training services—such as the one in Croydon, which does such a lot of good locally—will be able to bid direct to the funding councils rather than through the new sector colleges.

I raised that matter on the Adjournment of the House. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State understood my concern, but thought that institutions such as those in Croydon should be interested in exploring the possibility of incorporation within the new further education sector by reason of the balance of provisions that they make. That has been mentioned again today. Many of those institutions would not seek incorporation for the obvious reasons. It is important that the close link with the local authority remains.

The adult education service in Croydon is well supported by the local authority. It is important that that service is not barred from applying direct to the further education funding council. The possibility of incorporation represents a difficult route because of the close involvement and commitment of the local authority to that service, which is beneficial to it. That service has

[Mr. Humfrey Malins]

associations with many local agencies and voluntary organisations. It has its roots in the communities of Croydon. There is a good argument for amending clause 28 on Report to enable institutions such as those in Croydon to bid direct.

The Bill relates to issues which are crucial to many people—perhaps as many as 60,000 adults in Croydon. There is a great need for the type of adult education which is provided in Croydon, which has a multi-racial society. Many need extra help in English and other types of subject. The adult education service does a lot of good in such circumstances. It is a pity that we cannot spend more time just looking at some of the issues—for example, clause 28, which is quite important—which affect adult education.

I hope that, in future, this House of Commons, of which we are proud to be Members, will spend just a bit more time looking at what hon. Members do day after day. We should not just go through the Lobbies—half the time I do so without knowing for what I am voting. We should look more carefully at what we are doing and we should legislate less. We should spend more time trying to bring whatever expertise we may have to bear on the subject in question.

10.51 pm

Mr. Michael Carr (Ribble Valley): It was interesting to hear what the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) said about the need for deliberation and careful consideration of the issues which come before us. I agree wholeheartedly with him.

I accept that there may be a case for the use of the guillotine, but surely only after consultation with the official Opposition and the other parties. There was no attempt to consult with us prior to tonight about whether this guillotine should be introduced. We deplore that.

The Bill concerns major issues because it will determine the future of further, higher and adult education for many years. However, the debate on these issues will be held in the run-up to the general election at the fag-end of the Parliament. We are already aware that, more often than not, many hon. Members now use debates in the Chamber as an opportunity to score party political points. Why, oh why, could not the debate on the Bill be held after the general election?

The hon. Member for Croydon, North-West mentioned the number of students who attend adult education classes in Croydon. Throughout the country more than 3 million people attend adult education classes. They will study the motion and the Bill closely. They will want to know why the Government have decided to shove the Bill through in the final weeks of this Parliament. Surely some Conservative Members will concede that it would be far better for the debate on the Bill to take place in an atmosphere free from the heat of an imminent election.

I have no doubt that the Government's huge majority, caused by a distortion of the electoral system, will result in the guillotine motion being approved. I regret that, and we on this Bench will vote against it.

10.55pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I had not intended to speak on the motion, but I feel that I must bring to the attention of the House certain points made by the Select Committee on Procedure in two reports to the House on the passage of legislation.

One is that we should try to ensure that all parts of a measure are debated. The Committee has pointed out that nothing is more foolish than to have timetable motions introduced after a Committee has sat for some sessions, perhaps debating the first two or three clauses of a Bill, and then, the guilloting having been introduced, the rest of the Bill—perhaps 60, 70 or 80 clauses—is rushed through with hardly any debate. That must be the worst way of dealing with legislation.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) that an examination of other elected assemblies which can be paralleled to ours in Europe, America or elsewhere shows that we in the British House of Commons spend three, four or even five times longer debating legislation.

Opinions about timetabling motions have altered massively since I took over the chairmanship of the Select Committee on Procedure nearly nine years ago. In those days, nearly everybody was against the concept of timetabling. Now, Members in all parts of the House who have served on the Select Committee on Sittings of the House agree that it is essential to find a proper, reasonable and practical way to deal with legislation in Committee and on Report. Many take the view that there should be timetabling at the start of legislation to enable it to be seen that Members are dealing with all parts of legislation from the word go.

The knockabout, nice party debate that we are having, allowing the Opposition—whichever party is in power—to have a field day attacking the Government, does not achieve much. It happens with only a handful of Members in their places and achieves little, if any, coverage by the media. It could be considered a waste of prime parliamentary time. It would be better to have the whole thing established as part of our Standing Orders, adopting one of the suggestions of the Select Committee on Procedure.

As a member of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, I give nothing away—because it has been said in public session—when I say that consideration must be given to the views of the Lord President and the shadow Leader of the House about the timetabling of legislation, following some of the thinking on the subject of the Select Committee on Procedure.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) suggested that we need to ensure a proper amount of time for outside organisations to lobby the House. Everybody wants that, but outside organisations have been lobbying the House—they have certainly been lobbying me, and I am not in a special position—ever since the matter was being debated in the House of Lords. So although it is an important issue, it fails in this case.

If those on the Opposition Front Bench are right and there is an election on a certain day in April, the Government are right not to allow many hours of debate on the first few clauses so that subsequent clauses are rushed through without sufficient consideration. They are right to impose a timetable at the start of the Committee stage to ensure that all parts of the Bill are properly dealt with.

I was trying to calculate the exact number of hours which the motion allows the Committee to spend debating the Bill. The time set for one of the days is midnight, but it is not clear how long the Committee might sit for the first six days. It will sit at 10.30 am and then again at 4.30 pm, but it is not clear at what time it rises. It appears that it could rise after midnight. So hon. Members need not worry about keeping the debate going, because no rising time has been set; therefore, if the Opposition so wish, they have all the time in the world to debate the Bill.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with many of my hon. Friend's comments. We are endeavouring to give maximum flexibility to how clauses 1 to 14 are considered. Therefore, there will be plenty of time, with no fixed limit in the early sittings.

Sir Peter Emery: I am delighted that I have been able to hit on that point, because the flexibility means that the Opposition cannot claim that they will not have enough time to debate those clauses. They can continue to debate them all night, and even until the following morning, if they so desire.

However, my Committee does not believe that that is the best way to deal with legislation. We have always suggested that the proper time to rise is after 10 o'clock.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is so distinguished that it may be some time since he has sat on a Standing Committee. He omits a small detail in the form of the Government Whip. My hon. Friends who will sit on the Committee will be entertained to hear that they can debate the Bill for as long as they wish, but sadly it will be open to the Government Whip to stand up whenever he wishes and move the adjournment. As he knows that the Government will get the Bill in any event, nothing stops him doing that.

Sir Peter Emery: That is absolutely true. Moreover, nothing about time or my distinction would stop that happening. However, once Governments of either party know that they will complete a Bill on a certain day, they hand much of the power over to the Opposition to decide how they want to use that time to debate the proper timing and clauses. It is an integral point, but one that we well understand.

I am delighted to see that the Government are willing to introduce a timetable motion at the start of Second Reading. Years ago, they would never have done so. It will ensure that we do not waste time purely trying to show the Opposition's strength in delaying tactics, which gets nobody anywhere. Such parliamentary procedure in Committee is coming to an end, as it is being seen as a useless use of time. I congratulate the Government on introducing a timetable motion at the very start of the Committee stage.

11.4 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I am glad to have the chance of following the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Select Committee, although I strongly disagree with his suggestions, for reasons that I have given before and hope to repeat this evening.

The House of Commons would make a great mistake if it accepted the proposition that this is the right way for it to operate. I understood the eagerness of my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) in anticipating the events of the rest of the year. I shall rejoice greatly when they occur. I advise him and others to be extremely reticent in proceeding to the supposedly automatic system of introducing guillotine motions, especially after our experience of the past few years under the Government. My hon. Friend gave the details and I shall return to them in a moment.

Sir Peter Emery: I omitted one fact: there will be sadness on both sides of the House when the right hon. Gentleman no longer is a Member of the House, following his distinguished service.

Mr. Foot: Hon. Members will not be able to have a proper debate on a guillotine motion without me. I hand on some of my experience of these matters to both sides of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin talked of the boot being on the other foot. I thought that rather an inelegant phrase and I shall return to it.

I do not intend to speak for hours, but I should like to make a few further comments. The House would be wise to listen to the warnings from the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins). He stressed how unwise it was for the House to curtail Committee stages. In some respects, Committee is the most important stage—the atmosphere can be changed and the follies of Government can be corrected. Indeed, at the end of this Parliament, hon. Members should have learnt the lesson better than ever before.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) emphasised how important it was not merely for Members of Parliament but for our constituents to put their case. They will have little chance of doing so on the Bill in the circumstances in which the Leader of the House has introduced the guillotine.

I know that there has been discussion in the House of Lords, but that makes the offence worse. That may tempt more Governments to introduce more Bills there. That is the wrong way to proceed. I do not think much of the House of Lords anyhow, but it is essential for the proper performance of parliamentary government that the major Bills—this is one—are introduced first in this House. The House of Commons has the right to say first what it thinks of a Bill. The proper way to proceed is for Members of the House to consult their constituents and consider the whole Bill in detail first. The Government should have learnt that better than anyone.

The hon. Member for Honiton talked as if there were a great wave of support for the view that he and others advocate on this matter. I am not saying that there has not been considerable support for it, and he can report that to the House. I repeat, however, that a guillotine greatly injures the way in which the House operates. Of course, Governments like the guillotine, but the House is not in existence only to protect the rights of Governments and the Executive. It is even more than that—the House is here to protect the rights of different Oppositions.

I have said a good deal more on Government Back Benches than I have on Opposition Back Benches and very often it has been what has been done on Government Back Benches that has saved even Labour Governments from some of their follies. Even Labour Governments can

[Mr. Foot]

occasionally commit follies. They did not in the measures involving the five guillotines which I introduced. They were all excellent measures, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin who voted for them so enthusiastically, will confirm. I do not say that they all had the high quality of the measure that he introduced, but they were very fine measures indeed. On all, there had been a full chance for the House to discuss matters before the guillotine motions.

It is true that, without guillotines then, the Bills could not have been brought into operation. They had all figured prominently in the election manifesto of the Labour party at the time. That, of course, is not at all the circumstances now.

I do not expect shame from Ministers, but I should have thought that all the Ministers present, and all the others who might come in later, would be a little wary about pressing this matter. They all know that the Bill has been brought to the House in this form only because of the catastrophe of what happened on the Bills that were guillotined a few years ago—the poll tax Bills. Without them, we would not have had this legislation.

All the Ministers present are poll tax Ministers, as far as I can see. All of them, including the Leader of the House, voted for the poll tax. The right hon. Gentleman was a keen supporter of the poll tax. He had at his side that second eager poll tax supporter, the Secretary of State for Health. He may have been involved in some other misdemeanours at the same time, but he was also supporting the poll tax in the Cabinet. Then there is poll tax Patten. Why do we not have his intellectual contribution to this debate?

I remember many debates on poll tax motions when the chairman of the Conservative party came along. He was usually the person most eager to get the guillotine through. On this occasion, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin and others have pointed out, he has a special interest in being here. There has been real rudeness on the part of poll tax Patten, if I may use that unparliamentary way of describing him, but everybody knows who I mean. I have some difficulty in distinguishing between the parliamentary popinjays, or whatever they call themselves—the Pattens, the Patties and the patsies—I cannot tell the difference. All I know is that they all supported the poll tax and they all voted for the guillotines that carried through the poll tax legislation. I cannot recall a single one making any objection—except, of course, that great, noble figure, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), and even he did not object to the poll tax in Scotland. He thought that it should be tried out on the Scots. The Government did not have to worry about them; they are all anti-Tory anyhow. Along with all the rest of them, he voted to apply the poll tax, through that guillotine procedure, against all the Scots, as well as against all the Welsh and all the English. There are a few prominent poll tax Welsh Members sitting on the Government Benches today. They, too, voted with equal enthusiasm for the poll tax.

Had it not been for the guillotine debate, for the way in which the Government put the pressure on, for the way in which they shepherded all the sheep, ministerial and other, through the Lobbies, we would not be here today. We might even have had a decent election and the country might have been saved a good deal earlier, but everyone knows that that is how we got here. It is shocking that a guillotine motion should be produced in such circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin has proved to the hilt that there has been a greater, easier and more eager resort to the guillotine than at any time in English parliamentary history. *[Interruption.]* There was nothing on that scale in the Labour days. My hon. Friend gave the figures, and if a Conservative Member wishes to dispute them he is free to intervene and do so. There is no disputing what my hon. Friend has put on the record—the Government, who have a huge majority, have increasingly resorted to the use of the guillotine. That has merely shown their intellectual arrogance.

The House used to have the assistance of the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), or Oswestry as it was, until he was sacked. I have often thought that almost the most foolish act perpetrated by the previous Prime Minister was her sacking of the right hon. Gentleman. Apart from a few Labour competitors, he was the best Leader of the House that I have seen, certainly in a Conservative Government. The right hon. Lady got rid of him because he obviously used to say to the Cabinet, "You won't get away with this, you know. You can't go through with that. If you try to do it you will bulldoze the House and eventually the Members will revolt." The right hon. Gentleman may not have put it in quite such strong language, but no doubt that was the way in which he put the case to the Cabinet.

One of the important jobs of a Leader of the House is to report to the Cabinet and tell it what it cannot do. Unfortunately, the last three or four Leaders of the House—I have forgotten the count—have not done that. They have merely said, "Oh, no, we shall have a few more guillotines." I am afraid that the present Leader of the House has added to that ignoble record.

For all those reasons, I hope that the House will reject the idea of permanent guillotines. I hope that hon. Members will remember the Government's bad example. The Government thought they could force through legislation by that means, and legislation on a range of topics became worse and worse. We do not know whether this Bill will be any better. A major piece of legislation was introduced in the most shabby way in the other place. That did not happen in the better days that have gone. We now have to vote on the timing of its procedures, even though we have not had a single hour of discussion in Committee. That is the wrong way to run the House, and any Government who set such an example do grave injury to parliamentary government. That is the last thing that the Opposition wish to see.

11.17 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I oppose the guillotine motion.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). Over the years I have listened to many forceful speeches by the right hon. Gentleman, who always speaks common sense, and I have often agreed with him. The House will be the poorer after the election when the right hon. Gentleman will not be with us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) said it was stupid to have such a debate late at night. I think he said that the media did not pay attention to us. Perhaps he does not know that I have a suitcase full of letters from constituents who are desperately concerned about the Bill.

The reason why some of us have voted against the Second Reading and will vote against the guillotine is that, unless we put into effect this procedure of opposition, there is no proper way in which objections can be fairly and adequately considered. It is not a question of media time; it is not a question of wondering whether the media are listening. I have a duty to nearly a thousand people from the Leicester area who have written to me about adult basic education and community further education.

We have been lucky enough to see the Minister of State; he has been very kind and we have had really good discussions with him. Nevertheless, the fact remains that some of the points that we put to the Minister have not, in Leicestershire's view, been adequately met.

If this guillotine motion goes through, what do I do about the thousand or so letters that I have downstairs? I know that an election is coming, but as a conscientious Member I cannot treat them as so much confetti. All the letters suggest different ways in which the Bill can be improved, but if we accept this awful timetable motion tonight a Bill of nearly 100 clauses will have very limited time for discussion, and the guillotine will fall in Committee. How can any of the amendments be properly considered?

That is the tragedy of it all. That is why I think that the Government are desperately wrong. I say publicly that they are mistaken in trying to push this Bill through in the face of severe and fierce opposition, not just from committed Labour supporters but from rank-and-file Conservatives and from people who have no particular

We were lucky enough to see my hon. Friend the Minister of State a couple of times, and we tried to explain to him how we in Leicestershire would lose out. We pointed out to him that we have in that county a structure of adult basic education and community further education which the rest of the country can only dream of. We made it clear to him that we have many examples in Leicestershire of one-for-one adult education in the home. If people want to better themselves, they are entitled to enjoy this sort of instruction: it should not be denied them in a civilised society.

If the guillotine goes through tonight, what happens to all my amendments? I have sent dozens of letters to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science. The last one that he answered was, I think, dated October. None of my November, December or January letters about the Bill has even been acknowledged. I sent him an amendment to clause 5 of the Bill in December; it sought to improve the Bill by taking account—the wording was carefully considered—of existing providers of quality further and adult education. That is all we wanted in a small amendment to clause 5.

Our first discussion with the Minister of State took place four weeks ago. Last week he asked us to bring our experts along from Leicestershire to meet his experts and have a discussion. During the course of that discussion there was no way in which the Minister could do other than acknowledge that, after the Bill goes through, the existing privileged structure of adult basic education and further education in the county of Leicestershire can be other than damaged.

There is no way in which I can vote for a guillotine which so severely curtails debate in Committee. Moreover, what chance do I have of serving on the Committee? I have great respect for my right hon. and hon. Friends, but they will choose those of my hon. Friends who are in favour of the Bill, and I think that the Bill stinks. The Government are remiss to press on in the face of careful and constructive opposition, which has been voiced by experts from the county of Leicester and other parts of the country.

There is no way that I will support the guillotine motion. My fear is that I am not likely to serve on the Standing Committee, although I volunteer for such duty if the opportunity be there. The danger is that, if the guillotine motion goes through, the writers of the suitcase full of letters from my constituency will feel outraged, and they will express that outrage in the way that one would expect.

11.25 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr). It is important to recognise just what a major contribution to education Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire and the other counties that have developed community colleges have made. I simply regret that more counties did not develop such a system, and I am delighted at the way in which Conservative Members are fighting for what was good provision, developed in a bipartisan way over many years.

The first point that I want to make to the Leader of the House is just how bad the guillotine motion is. As I understand the timetable, not only is the Bill being rushed through the Committee, but the timetable is set up in such a way that it looks as though Ministers will refuse all the amendments tabled in Committee. If the Bill leaves Committee on 28 February, and has to be reprinted to take account of amendments, it will only just scrape through, presumably on the Monday, before the Budget. If any amendments have been made, the Bill will have to return to the other place. That would be a tight schedule.

I suspect that the Government will resist all amendments. In that case, is there any point in having a Committee? I will watch the Committee with a great deal of interest to see whether the Government are prepared to make any concessions on either principle or detail. I very much fear that they have decided that the Bill that left the House of Lords is the Bill that will go on to the statute book, and all the proceedings in this House are a formality. If the Leader of the House wishes to intervene to assure us that, if reasonable amendments are tabled in Committee, the Government can accept them, within the timetable, I shall gladly give way, I suspect that they are determined to push the Bill through without further amendments.

Mr. Straw: I invite my hon. Friend to press the Leader of the House to give a clear undertaking that amendments may be accepted, on their merits, by the Government. This is of critical importance to whether the Government are treating the House with contempt.

Mr. Bennett: I do not need to press the Leader of the House. If he wants to assure us that the Government intend to accept amendments, tabled either from Conservative or Labour Members, even if they are minor, he is welcome to intervene.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot comment on the merits of amendments that have not yet been tabled, so I do not want to talk about the principle of any amendment. However, I can say that, within the procedures laid down, it would be possible for amendments to be moved and voted on, and, if the Government think that there is merit in them, to be accepted.

Mr. Bennett: The Leader of the House has not answered the question. I asked whether the pressure of the timetable would be such that the Government would decide that there were no merits in any of the amendments. It will be difficult for the Government to get the Bill through if they are prepared to accept amendments, because the Bill will then have to return to the House of Lords. I have every sympathy for those hon. Members who serve on the Committee, but I suspect that they will be lucky if they persuade the Government to reconsider one jot of the Bill.

We started this Parliament with the so-called great Education Reform Bill. When the then Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), introduced that measure, he tried to compare it to the Education Act 1944. He claimed that it would stand the test of time. I suppose that, by comparison with the poll tax that he dreamed up, it has stood the test of time. But was it really such a good education reform measure? Of course, the then Secretary of State had to use the guillotine. He slammed that Bill through the House.

We have seen all sorts of problems develop. Opposition Members suggested, especially in Committee, that a little more time ought to be devoted to the whole question of the national curriculum, particularly those aspects of it relating to testing. The Secretary of State was confident that everything could be done, but we all know what a fiasco the test for seven-year-olds has turned out to be, and how the Government have had to keep rethinking it. If only they had taken a little more time in Committee, if only they had listened to some of the arguments, if only they had not been so determined to rush forward, much damage to seven-year-olds would have been avoided.

Then there was the whole question of the opting out of schools. Opposition Members opposed the idea of grant-maintained schools. We opposed the principle, but we also told the Government that, if they intended to go ahead, they ought to consider some of the problems that might arise if grant-maintained schools should go wrong. But the Government insisted that there was no chance of a grant-maintained school's going wrong, as the great and the good would be on its governing body. Everything would be perfectly all right, so there was no need to build into the Bill any provision by which the local authority could step back in, or any mechanism to sort out problems. The Government pushed ahead with great enthusiasm. The Bill was bashed through the House of Commons and through the Committee.

The Secretary of State may be aware of Stratford school down at Newham. It seems that the rules and regulations provided for in the legislation were not able to sort out that situation with any ease. It must be embarrassing for the Government to face the first grant-maintained school to have gone wrong and publicly got into so much difficulty. If only they had taken the time to listen to some of the arguments in Committee, they would have realised that our opposition was valid. Some safety mechanism ought to have been built in to deal with the worst scenario, but the Government were determined to push the legislation through.

The Government are determined, under the Bill that we are considering tonight, to set up colleges of further education as free-standing institutions. Have they considered what will happen if one of these colleges should go wrong? They are relying very heavily on the quality of the principal and of the governing body.

We all hope that no college will get into difficulty, but the likelihood is that somewhere in the country a principal and his governing body will be at loggerheads, or a college will not be run as efficiently as it ought to be. I wonder whether the Government have put into this Bill a mechanism to deal with such a situation. Regardless of the merits of taking the control of colleges away from local authorities, that is a matter of detail that ought to be considered very carefully.

During the passage of the Education Reform Act 1988, we had a long argument about whether we should get rid of the binary divide. Again the Government brushed us aside and accused us of talking nonsense: of course the binary divide had to be kept. This is a matter to which my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) referred on Second Reading today.

Within three years, the Government saw the good sense of what Opposition Members had said. If they had taken a little more time in Committee, if they had allowed a little more debate at that stage, they might have seen the good sense of our case. The Government, instead of timetabling lots of Bills, ought to provide sufficient time to debate one or two of them effectively.

The Government seem to set their face against local democracy. They sought through the Education Reform Act 1988 to take powers from local authorities and they seek to do so by means of the Bill. There is a common strand. I do not understand why the Government hate local democracy so much, unless it is that Labour councils are elected. Belief in local democracy hangs on whether we are prepared to let those with whom we disagree have their point of view and, if necessary, run institutions.

The Government claim that they are democratic and believe in democracy, but when it comes to local democracy, they remove powers from local authorities and give them to unelected appointees. They assume that that is somehow better than having elected representatives. Yet they are so pleased that in eastern Europe Governments are getting rid of people who were appointed rather than elected; they consider that that is good. I merely say to the Conservative party that it should show some faith in local democracy. If it or the Government have no faith in local democracy, it is hard for them to have faith in national democracy.

Guillotine motions are an erosion of the democratic process. They hand over power to the Executive. The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) has been a continual enthusiast of guillotines and timetabling. I do not know whether that is because he is a part-time Member with other interests who does not want to spend as much time in the House as some others, but unfortunately the hon. Gentleman misleads the House. I have been a Member of this place since 1974, and I have not served as a member of a Standing Committee in opposition when the Opposition have not timetabled consideration of the Bill from the beginning. They have worked out how they want to allocate time.

It is not true to say that the consideration of Bills is not timetabled. It is a matter of who does the timetabling. The tradition of the House has been that the Opposition have the right to arrange the timetabling until such time as they demonstrate to the Government that they are not prepared to deliver the Bill. In the main, the idea that entire sections of Bills are not properly debated is nonsense. Occasionally an entire clause will not be debated, but that will be because it has appeared in previous legislation, and it is clear that there is no political controversy. All those who are consulted outside the House see nothing wrong with that. Why should we spend an hour debating a clause if no one can see any problem with it?

Time will be allocated to clauses when there is party controversy or drafting problems, but to spread the idea that Bills are not timetabled is to spread nonsense. In the Committees on which I have served in opposition, those that have been well run—the majority—have proceeded with a clear allocation of time that has been well in everyone's mind, and there has been adherence to it. There have been very few filibusters on the Bills with which I have been involved. It is dangerous for the House to try to change its procedure because in any one Session there have been one or two Bills on which there have been filibusters as opposed to genuine attempts to scrutinise.

I use what is now the Education Reform Act 1988 as an example of a Bill that was slammed through the House, including its consideration in Committee, with all its warts remaining. The Government made no attempt to modify it, and they are now paying the penalty. I hope that the Government will not introduce more guillotine motions and that even at this late stage they will say that they want a proper Bill for further and higher education, and they want a proper scrutiny. The Government have clearly created a major problem for non-vocational further education. It has not been overcome, and it will have to be resolved by introducing further legislation after the general election. It would be far better to bring consideration of the motion to an end and to have proper scrutiny rather than to rush another measure on to the statute book that will quickly have to be amended or repealed.

11.38 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I have listened with interest to what Labour Members said about the timetable motion. We have already heard from the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that they have very little objection to the vast majority of the clauses on higher education. Articles in the education press say that Labour is offering the Government a deal in respect of putting the Bill on the statute book before the general election. If that is so, very little time will be needed in which to consider the higher education part, and there will be more than enough time in which to discuss matters that I regard as important —for instance, the question of a pay review body for lecturers, which has been raised with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

It is no good saying that we cannot have such a body because quite large sources of funding for universities, colleges and polytechnics are connected with sponsorship, given that, with today's graded posts, it is possible to build into sponsors' contracts agreed amounts representing the salary of the lecturer involved, and also to make sure that the salary keeps with the recommendations of the pay review body. We could and should consider the matter during the passage of the Bill.

There will also be adequate time for us to consider the question of the naming of some polytechnics and, particularly, institutes of higher education. The Government's policy of freeing the polytechnics and institutes of higher education from the control of local authorities has been one of the major successes of Government policy on higher education. Alongside that development, there is the fact that in 1979 one in eight school leavers went into higher education, while today's terrific figure is one in four. That is an increase of 270,000.

It is now only logical to allow those same colleges and polytechnics to consider themselves universities, particularly when we bear in mind that they are now

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degree-awarding institutions. I shall seek—and no doubt will find, in the time available—an opportunity to make a special plea for Edge Hill institute of higher education in Ormskirk, in my constituency, to be allowed to adopt the title of university college. I have expressed that view to the Secretary of State, and I hope that he will give it serious consideration.

The important part of the Bill on which the timetable motion will have an impact deals with the further education colleges' becoming independent free-standing institutions and having their own funding council. Clearly, following the success of the polytechnics' independence, that is a logical extension of the policy and the time available should be directed towards discussion of the matter.

Especially important is a problem that we face in Lancashire which has been brought about by the Bill and which—as a consequence—the timetable motion actually helps. I would go so far as to say that what Lancashire county council is doing makes it essential that the Bill is debated in full and passes into law. I refer to the fact that the council is behaving as if the Bill were already on the statute book. Despite representations made by Conservative county councillors, it has cut from its budget £4 million in grants and fees for adult students going into full-time further education. Representations have been made on the finance committees to reduce that cut, and there have been alternative suggestions—for instance, that £265,000 should be taken from administration or £160,000 from that sacred cow of the Labour party in Lancashire, Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. Unfortunately, a blind eye has been turned on that. The livelihoods and futures of 900 FE students in Lancashire are being deliberately ignored and abused by the Lancashire county council Labour group.

This is one of the meanest cuts ever to have been made in local government expenditure—from a local authority with a budget of more than £1 billion which could afford to make cuts elsewhere to save the education of 900 FE students. However, the local authority is not prepared to do that, which is a great shame upon it.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Hind: I give way to the apologist for the Labour group on Lancashire county council, the shadow Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman did not vote against the local government finance Bills that have led to the capping and the potential capping of county councils such as Lancashire. He voted for those measures to control Lancashire county council's total spending and that of every other authority. That authority is being forced to cut the budgets of colleges in his constituency and in mine because he voted for the budgets to be cut. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends alone bear the responsibility for what is happening in Lancashire. There is no way in which the hon. Gentleman can get out of that, and his electors understand that all too well.

Mr. Hind: I totally reject what the hon. Gentleman says. He should look at parallel authorities, such as Hampshire and Cheshire and other well-run Conservative authorities, which manage such funding from within their budgets and which are not facing the same problems because they are not profligate, spend, spend, spend authorities. The hon. Gentleman should advise the Labour group on the county council to think again on behalf of those 900 students——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancashire) *rose*——

Mr. Hind: I give way to my hon. Friend——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Perhaps we should return to the allocation of time motion.

Mr. Hind: You are right to call me to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I return to the question why the timetable motion is vital. During our discussions, we shall have to look for ways to help those students. They will certainly not get that help from Lancashire county council because that authority will not do anything about their problem.

I speak also on behalf of the 10 FE colleges in Lancashire, including Skelmersdale college, that are affected because, although the budgets of those colleges will be greater under the funding council that is proposed in the Bill, the formula that will follow in years to come may be affected because the very students whom we wish to help by funding their grants and fees may not be able to get the assistance to take up their places in the future, which will mean empty places and wasted funds.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend believe that there will be time, under the timetable, to discuss the fact that, although our colleges of further education and our adult education sector take only 15 per cent. of the county's education spending, 65 per cent. of the cuts will be inflicted on that sector? I repeat: although that sector accounts for only 15 per cent. of education expenditure, it is being asked to take 65 per cent. of the cuts.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Clearly, the time that is to be made available will enable us to discuss that matter.

It is also important for the Committee to consider the fact that, since the introduction of an FE formula for the FE sector, the budget of the FE college at Skelmersdale in my constituency increased in the first year by 40 per cent. and by 20 per cent. last year. That is the result of central Government intervention, which is being built on by the Bill. It is another important reason why the timetable motion should be passed and our consideration of the Bill should proceed.

I hope that the time provided by the timetable motion will give us an opportunity to discuss the position of the deaf students who will be attending FE colleges following the passage of the Bill. Lecturers in FE colleges who deal with the deaf have expressed their concern to ensure that their students are properly funded and cared for. I hope that that issue, along with adult education, will be dealt with.

It seems to me from the attitude of Lancashire that the Labour party is saying to itself that the timetable motion and the Bill are bound to go through and therefore it will act accordingly. It is almost planning for the future as if it will not win the general election anyway. It accepts that the Conservatives will be returned to the House and that the Bill will be the pillar of further education in the future. Therefore, we ought to give it a fair wind.

The only thing that I would say to the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) is that I hope that, when we debate motions such as this in the future, Opposition Front Benchers, who will inevitably be Labour Members, will read all his speeches on guillotine motions and use them as a model. Undoubtedly, we shall hear them for many years to come from the Opposition Dispatch Box.

11.50 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I wish to speak against the guillotine motion because I am worried that there was not enough time in the Second Reading debate, and there will not be sufficient time in Committee, to discuss some of the important issues in the Bill.

The Bill covers a wide range of further education and higher education institutions. There may well be a consensus on some of them, but the Bill is so wide that I cannot see how the issues about which there is anxiety can be given the hearing and debate that they deserve. Nor will it be possible to take into account the representations which all Members of Parliament have received, particularly on adult education.

An example of a matter on which I do not believe that there will be adequate discussion is sixth form colleges. The John Leggott sixth form college in Scunthorpe has a first-class reputation. It has done well under local authority control. There is bewilderment about why such a successful education institution has to be taken away from the local education authority and put into central Government care and control. We know that the reason is not that it will make education any better. The reason is the poll tax and the desire to reduce local government expenditure by taking a set of budget headings under central Government control.

Several issues which affect sixth form colleges need to be considered, and I doubt whether there will be time to consider them under the timetabling. They include the lack of responsibility for local strategic planning which will result from greater centralised control of education; the mechanisms that will be used by the funding councils to determine the level of funding for local sixth form colleges; who will decide and control the curriculum of sixth form colleges; and the developments within individual institutions. These are matters of great concern to the staff in my local sixth form college. They see no educational benefits in being taken away from local authority control.

Many hon. Members raised the subject of adult education. There are issues of real concern about adult education. I still have not heard Ministers explain to the House why organisations such as Humberside adult education service, a large and successful organisation, will have to go through the FE colleges to obtain funding for their vocational sector. That seems to undermine the principle of a successful scheme. Many thousands of adult education students do not see the benefit or logic of taking part of adult education away from LEAs, thus splitting it and undermining it.

Why cannot the Government allow large institutions such as Humberside adult education service to bid in its own right to the funding councils to ensure that it can continue in its own successful way?

A number of concerns have been mentioned to me. One issue influences me most of all, and I doubt whether there will be time to discuss it properly in Committee. A successful adult education service works on a devolved basis. Within my constituency many smaller towns and villages benefit from such a service. It provides a wide range of services, qualifications and courses. Under the proposals in the Bill, that service stands to lose approximately half its courses and half its staff. Yet it will be expected to continue to maintain the same level of infrastructure, comprising colleges and centres around the county, especially in the rural areas.

Women will be the main losers from the changes. One of the advantages of an adult education service which operates in villages and small towns is that it is convenient for women, many of whom wish to improve their qualifications and return to work, to attend courses near their homes.

Humberside adult education service also provides crèche facilities for many courses. That facility is also likely to be undermined by the approach in the Bill.

I do not wish to criticise the local further education college because it also does a good job. The relationship between the college, the adult education service and the sixth form college is very good. It is fortunate that, with Humberside education authority under Labour control, we have such a good record on education in the county that local institutions have been so successful.

However, I am concerned that, because of the timetabling of the Bill, there is a suggestion that the Government will be unwilling to accept any amendments, because if they do the Bill will have to go back to the other place and there will be a risk of delaying it. I strongly urge the Government to listen to the representations that they are receiving and will receive from thousands of students of adult education.

I am pleased that some Conservative Members have also suggested, succinctly and eloquently, to the Government that there is a risk of damaging a first-rate service simply because they have not given enough thought to adult education. It is a victim of their drive to tinker about with the education service, for no good reason, and of their hatred of local government. I do not understand why they hate local government so much. It is not a party matter—they hate Conservative, Liberal and Labour authorities alike. At least they are consistent in their dislike of local government.

Local government has done a good job in education. It is close to the people it serves, and local people put it there to ensure that it delivers that service. All over the world centralised structures are being broken down, but the Government are more intent on taking away devolved accountability and moving towards a centralised, bureaucratic structure, which will not deliver the same levels of service and will not be responsive to local people's needs.

The Bill is fatally flawed and undermines the principle of adult education and the provision of a certain level of service for thousands of people who depend upon it. If the Government do not allow proper discretion in Committee and do not accept a reasonable amendment to allow adult education services to bid separately, the choice will be clear to the people. If the Government will not do it for them, the forthcoming Labour Government most certainly will, and people will know how to mark their ballot papers.

11.58 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): The Opposition know that I am a fair person; I shall not speak at great length. I appreciate that, when an Opposition is faced with a large Government majority, often the only weapon that they have is time.

When Bills are debated, often so much time is taken up on the earlier clauses that, unfortunately, there is insufficient time to study later clauses that are equally important. The Bill is of great importance to education and therefore it is right that we should have a timetable which ensures that sufficient time is available to discuss each clause sensibly and in depth. That also means that hon. Members on each side of the House may call upon the Secretary of State and his ministerial team to give specific assurances or undertakings.

We are seeking the pursuit of excellence, because without it we will be unable to compete with the rest of the world. Therefore, the Government are concentrating their attention on those vocational and academic courses that lead to national certification. That is the only way in which we will be able to compete, educationally, with the rest of the world.

In common with some Opposition Members, I am anxious about community education, so I need enough time to discuss it. I am worried about whether LEAs will have sufficient funds to enable important community classes to continue without the need for high subscription charges. Recreational and leisure courses give people self-esteem, they get people out of the house, and they have an important social function. Often such courses give people the self-confidence to undertake more vocational courses, and I want enough time to receive assurances from the Government about their future.

Littleborough and Saddleworth are covered by the two boroughs of Oldham and Rochdale, and they are worried about the Bill. About 20,000 people in each borough undertake leisure and recreational courses, and long may they continue to do so. My right hon. and learned Friend has given us reassurances about those courses, but it is important that there is sufficient funding to ensure that they continue.

I appreciate that, in many cases, the Opposition play fair and that they do not take up time unnecessarily in Committees. However, I am sure that the Opposition also appreciate, and probably accept, that, on occasion, time is the only weapon left to them, especially when faced by a large Government majority. Therefore, they seek to frustrate legislation with which they are not too pleased by taking up all the available time. Often that means that we end up in a mess because we have only one and a half hours to debate remaining clauses which we need more time to consider. Therefore, a timetable is common sense.

I do not want to say any more because I wish to be fair to the Opposition. I believe that the Bill is most important and that, therefore, it is right to ensure that we set aside enough time for each of its clauses to be considered in depth.

12.2 am

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I do not believe that the comments of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) on the guillotine motion were appropriate.

Anyone in the Strangers Gallery who listened to the debate leading up to the vote at 10 pm would be entitled to think that the purpose of the guillotine motion was to prevent Conservative Back Benchers from having the time of their lives by attacking the Bill and expressing the strength of public feeling that exists in the county seats that they mainly represent.

It will prevent them from outlining the destruction that the Bill may wreak on the provision of adult education and further education in their areas. This is the first time that one could interpret the imposition of the guillotine as a means of preventing Conservative Members from having their say about a piece of last-minute Conservative legislation. I am sure that anyone who heard the earlier debate would agree that that is a fair conclusion to reach.

It is important to consider the perils of rushing through the legislation by imposing a timetable. We should remember that such timetables inevitably mean that consideration of legislation is rushed. That means that one forgets to consider how the Bill fits in with other existing legislation on further and higher education. We have been asked to rush the Bill through without attempting to debug the problems that it will raise. Therefore, one ends up with a legislative Molotov cocktail. That cocktail is aimed at the heart of my constituency for rare, if not unique, reasons.

I have in my constituency a building of which I have fond memories. The count was held there when I was first elected. It used to be called Llandaf tech, part of what was the South Glamorgan institute of higher education, recently renamed the Cardiff institute of higher education. Most of those with whom I was at school went there, after leaving school at 15 to do apprenticeships and so on, on their day release and for night school studies.

Within the Cardiff institute of higher education are a large number of further education students. One effect of rushing through legislation such as this is that we shall shortly be introducing a split between further and higher education. The Cardiff institute has four campuses, but the biggest problem concerns the one in my constituency. There are 900 FE students and 40 members of staff teaching them, making it equivalent to an average FE college. So it is a college within a college—a college of FE that is housed in an HE institution.

Rushing the Bill through without considering the side effects will result, next September, in those 900 students and 40 members of staff being in serious danger of being out on the street. They will have nowhere to go and no alternative premises.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Really!

Mr. Morgan: The Secretary of State may screw up his nose at that, but I assure him that I am describing the situation. Negotiations are taking place between civil servants at the Welsh Office—as the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales will confirm—the two colleges, including the nearest FE college, and the county council.

I will explain how this unusual situation has come about and why the Secretary of State must give more thought to the Bill to ensure that all the problems are out of the way before the Government start shovelling legislation off the back of a lorry in this way before the election, without considering the plight of 900 students and 40 members of staff who are in serious danger of being homeless. We are talking of a college with no name, as it were, but it will soon be a college with no home.

Most places have an adequate network of FE colleges, but we in South Glamorgan have not. We have only two, and they are at each end of the county. There is not one in my area, so the central section of South Glamorgan—having a population, including bits of other constituencies, of 150,000 to 200,000—is without an FE college. When the FE students are brought out of the Cardiff institute of higher education, consider what will happen.

Obviously, the institute will not want to house those students any longer because to fulfil the funding requirements of this measure, if it is not amended—and we shall not have time to consider such issues under the guillotine—all the FE students will have to leave. Where will they go? In most other areas, they would go into an FE institution nearby. What happens if, as in my area, there is not one nearby?

The Bill also has the effect of removing all co-ordination between the LEA and the FE colleges and HE institutions. Up to now, all of them being under the same management, they could easily integrate. South Glamorgan county council's education department could say "We appreciate why the institute of higher education wants to get the 900 FE students and 40 members of staff out, so we will lease a temporary building to the institute, or to Barry college of further education, to house this college within a college."

But as soon as the council says that, the Welsh Office replies, "In that case, it will be a building used for further education, and as soon as you lease it to us, we will grab it and pass it over to the FE funding council." That will happen because the Bill has not had adequate debate. That will seriously increase the danger of 900 students and 40 members of staff on courses such as plumbing, catering and hairdressing, enabling young men and women to enter vocational courses, perhaps finding themselves out in the middle of Western avenue doing their work because there is nowhere for them to go. Western avenue is a lovely dual carriageway bypass, but it is no place to begin one's further education.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: That is obviously a Welsh Office problem and the hon. Gentleman will no doubt correspond with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Welsh Office. However, I do not understand why the further education part of the college is being thrown out, as the hon. Gentleman fears. It is not unusual for higher and further education to be combined in various parts of the United Kingdom. Nene college at Nuneaton combines higher and further education, and the funding arrangements in the Bill will accommodate continued funding for both parts of its activities. Nene college has existed under the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council for some years, and has also accommodated the funding of its further education.

The hon. Gentleman will have to give more details about why somebody has decided to throw the college off its site before the Welsh Office can respond adequately, as it will no doubt do in due course. I can see no rational reason why the college should appear to be in such a stark crisis.

Mr. Morgan: I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, who is sitting next to the Secretary of State now, can confirm that his civil servants have been negotiating with the education department of South Glamorgan county council and the two colleges—the present Cardiff institute of higher education and the Barry college of further education—for several months to devise temporary and permanent solutions, such as a temporary annexe to house students.

It is up to the Secretary of State to explain his legislation, but I understand that civil servants have been devoting time to the problem, and I presume that they would not do so if it was not a problem. With the advantages of their education and qualifications, and the firm leadership of the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, they would have solved the matter in five minutes flat.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Who owns the property, and why have the owners—I presume that it is an authority—taken it into their collective head to throw the college off the site?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not the right moment to debate the matter. The hon. Gentleman was saying that he thought that time should be available to debate the matter. It should not be debated now.

Mr. Morgan: I have gone to enormous lengths, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to avoid offending the strictures of speaking on a guillotine motion as distinct from a substantive Bill.

Without adequate time, the Secretary of State is liable to fall into the trap of waiving problems, as he is now trying to do, rather than seriously studying them. He tries to pretend that the problem does not exist, even though it obviously does. The attempt by civil servants from the Welsh Office to find a solution to it proves that there is a serious problem. We have about six months to avert disaster to the foundations of vocational further education in my county, and particularly my constituency, unless the Government find a way to ensure that the Bill is adequately debated long before it has any chance of becoming the law under which education must operate.

Mr. Clarke: I think that I can help the hon. Gentleman and get us back into order. The hon. Gentleman obviously does not know the cause of that great problem. I accept his assurance that civil servants at the Welsh Office do, and I assure him that he will receive a reply in due course from my hon. Friends the Minister of State or the Under-Secretary of State, whose Parliamentary Private Secretary is on the Bench listening to the debate.

Mr. Morgan: The Secretary of State is doing his best to waive the problem. I think that I know what is wrong with the Bill, but it is not my job to explain the legislation to the House. I understand that the consequences of the Bill will combine with other recent legislation, which is why I referred to a legislative Molotov cocktail aimed at the heart of further education in my constituency. The dual effect of the so-called autonomy of further and higher education colleges, combined with the funding arrangements for higher education, will mean that, to make their buildings pay, higher education colleges must fill them with students of higher education. They will therefore have to remove further education students as quickly as possible, preferably by next September, from their present buildings.

Normally, that would not pose a problem, but in areas without a full network of FE colleges it does. My constituency is outstandingly short of FE institutions. It

[Mr. Morgan]

does not matter whether they can be integrated under the local authority. Given that there is a firm separation between the school sector, which is still in local authority ownership, and the new further and higher education colleges, which are autonomous and report to the further education funding council for Wales and the higher education funding council for Wales, all three institutions will now be separate. The Government have not thought ahead to the consequences in areas such as Cardiff, West, where there is no place of further education half-empty or with a little spare capacity which could absorb the transfer courses from the higher education institutions where FE is taught on the same campus as HE.

I can assure the Secretary of State that that poses a problem that we do not have long to solve. I am horrified that the Bill will be rushed through when it is on the point of creating serious problems.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that I am not responsible for education at the Welsh Office; that is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. He is unwell this evening, so I am sitting in listening to the debate. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will draw his remarks to my right hon. Friend's attention. He will get a full letter on the subject, and my right hon. Friend will undoubtedly discuss the matter with him.

Mr. Morgan: In that case, I am happy to draw my remarks to a close. Obviously the Under-Secretary is taking a different attitude from that of the Secretary of State for Education and Science. The hon. Gentleman suspects that there is a problem, whereas the Secretary of State does not accept that but tries to wave the issue away as though it does not exist, even though Welsh civil servants have been heavily engaged in trying to figure out the problem.

There are no transitional arrangements for easing the path of FE work as it moves out of fully integrated local authority control into the autonomous, semi-independent institutions of which the Government are so fond. The Government do not realise that sometimes there are not the buildings. Sometimes, any offers by the county council to provide funding are rejected or constructively suggested with a "Yes, fine—you spend the £2 million in South Glamorgan, and we will take over the new asset that you are about to create." That is a wholly inadequate response. Obviously it would be financially irresponsible of the county council to spend £2 million of its own money only to have the further education funding council for Wales say, "Thank you very much, we will grab it and use it for ourselves."

The problem must be solved. Without its solution, the Government will stand condemned of having destroyed the foundations of further education in south Glamorgan and, in particular, my constituency.

12.17 am

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): It grieves me that in the self-styled mother of Parliaments I should see not the Secretary of State, his two hirelings, or some rebellious Back-Bencher, but the Leader of the House himself attempt matricide. For what reason does he have his hands bloodied?—for a Bill that is, to say the least, cheap and ill-thought-out and that should not be appearing before the House.

The Secretary of State has shown on every occasion possible his ignorance and lack of concern about education. On this occasion he has done so not even for reasons of ideology. In a sense, I could excuse the timetable if he had ideological reasons for doing what he wants to do, but it is sheer prejudice. It is his paranoia about local government, to which he returns time and again. This is a cheap way of saving a little money.

We know that the relationship between adult and further education has been nurtured not by central Government but by local government of both political complexions. Let me mention the old West Riding, when it was under Conservative control, and the work that it pioneered in further education and adult education. It was careful work, because it demanded that one put together in a delicate way the relationship between the two. As with the distinction between pure and applied, the distinction between adult education and FE is very fine indeed; and one merges with the other. The way in which the Secretary of State is proposing to deal with them, in the most cavalier fashion, means that he is intent upon destroying their spirit. He has not, for example, thought out carefully the funding of adult education, and the special experiments that have been started by local government, not by his Department, which are succeeding and which are adding quality to people's lives.

I am thinking, for example, of the Castleford women's centre in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), which also serves my constituency, and the pioneering work that it has done. It has become part of the community, is helping in reducing juvenile crime and is running a range of positive courses which contribute to the members' own satisfaction. All that is being put heedlessly at risk. It is also geared to New college, which is a sixth form college, quite different from the existing further education college, to which it is also allied. It has an intricate relationship with the University of Leeds, the sixth form college and the college of further education.

The Secretary of State does not understand what he is doing with this Bill, and he never will, because he wishes to push it through without the evidence being put before him. We know what the Secretary of State does with evidence. If it is inconvenient to him, he suppresses it, as he has done with this Bill. He will not publish; he refuses to publish. That is typical of the way in which he approaches something which is of value to society, because he does not recognise its value; he thinks only, as Oscar Wilde would say, of its price.

Therefore, we must reject the Bill. We have to make sure that we can properly examine what is being done in further education and adult education so that we may save for future generations the gems which the Minister wishes heedlessly to destroy.

12.22 am

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): As a matter of principle, I am opposed to all timetable motions because I regard them as a negation of the democratic process. I had intended to make my point in an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind). I will be brief, because I understand that there are Opposition Members who want to speak.

My concern is fourfold. I have community colleges in my constituency, and it is my belief that such colleges demand and earn the respect of all people. They are extremely important and they offer an extremely good service to the community.

My worry is whether, by passing this guillotine motion, we shall reduce the amount of time that can be spent in examining whether under this Bill community colleges in rural areas such as Devon will be disadvantaged in comparison with similar colleges elsewhere in metropolitan areas, where I accept that there is a certain degree of competition between the colleges. Anxiety has been expressed to me about the composition of the regional councils. I hope that setting a timetable will not make it impossible to examine not only the structure of the regional councils but their composition. Who exactly will sit on the councils?

I do not regard the Bill as an attack on local education authorities or, indeed, on local democracy, but it is important that we take time to examine every aspect of the funding councils to ensure that we are not abandoning local education authorities in favour of what is in effect a pig in a poke. There is certainly great anxiety about funding, because until now it has been an easy option to cut adult education and non-vocational courses in the colleges. They have been an easy target in the past. If one of the Bill's objectives is to steady or perhaps increase funding of the colleges, it will gain my support. However, I am concerned about the future of community courses, especially in Devon, and when the Minister replies I urge him to give an undertaking that the aspects of the Bill that I have highlighted will not be disadvantaged by the passing of the guillotine motion.

12.25 am

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I shall address the substantial points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). He spoke about two matters, the first of which was the danger of hasty legislation and how it eventually catches up with us. The second was the danger of forcing such a tight timetable on legislation that important lobby organisations with much valuable advice to offer do not have time to give that advice. He gave various examples of such legislation but failed to mention the most recent example of a guillotined Bill, the Education (Schools) Bill. The Opposition remain convinced that that Bill contains many chickens waiting to come home to roost. Examples are the quality control of privatised inspectors, the possibility of cosy relationships between inspectors and the schools that hire them, the possibility of inspections going wrong and the question of what happens if a school finds itself in trouble at an awkward point in the cycle of inspections.

In Committee, we argued exhaustively about a range of issues, but none of our advice was accepted, and we are convinced that an ill-thought-out Bill is on its way into law. I have here a document that illustrates not only that point but the difficulty faced by important lobby organisations in trying to give advice during the passage of the Bill. It is a briefing document from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of Universities in the United Kingdom, and I saw it on my board this afternoon as I was coming into the Chamber for Second Reading. It was marked urgent, which is indicative enough, and it draws urgent attention to clauses 68 and 81. When I read what had been referred to, it seemed that clause 66 and not clause 68 was the relevant one. That illustrates the haste with which this august body, the CVCP, had to produce the briefing document.

Clause 68—I think that that is the one that was meant—is of horrendous significance. The report of the debate on the clause in the other place in early February covered 27 columns of *Hansard*, and amendments were made on Third Reading. The clause refers to the terms and conditions attached to grants made to, and from, the funding councils. That is of great importance.

There is an overt intention in the clause that the Secretary of State should be able to attach terms and conditions to the grants made available to the funding councils. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals does not object to the general application of such a clause, but it finds some difficulties, and here is something that strikes at the heart of the integrity of the higher education system. The difficulties arise when it comes to the matters on which the Secretary of State is able to lay down terms and conditions and the extent to which he can override the funding councils' discretion to release funds to individual institutions. He can make exceptional determinations in relation to individual institutions.

The Department of Education and Science, I am told by the CVCP, stated that the Secretary of State thought that he had those powers under the Education Reform Act 1988, but this has been put in doubt by judgments of counsel. The DES claimed that it was always intended that the powers of the Secretary of State should be used in that way, but the previous Secretary of State gave a categoric assurance:

> "I have no intention of using my power to attach conditions to influence the allocation of funds to individual institutions. That is properly a matter for the Funding Councils." [*Official Report, Standing Committee J*, 16 February 1988; c. 1446.]

He gave a similar assurance on 24 March, but I will not burden the House by reading the full text of that assurance. It reiterated what he had said earlier.

At no time during the passage of the Education Reform Bill were such intended uses of the powers discussed with the CVCP. Representatives of the CVCP's views argued this clause through 27 columns of the *Official Report* of the House of Lords, such was the importance that they attached to the principle. They managed to get an amendment, which I shall read to the House. Clause 68 says:

> "The Secretary of State may make grants to each of the councils of such amounts and subject to such terms and conditions as he may determine."

Then we come to the amendment:

> "The terms and conditions subject to which grants are made by the Secretary of State to either of the councils—
>
> (a) may in particular impose requirements to be complied with in respect of every institution, or every institution falling within a class or description specified in the terms and conditions . . . before financial support of any amount or description so specified is provided by the council in respect of activities carried on by the institution".

As the CVCP says,

> "Subsection 2(a) of the clause is now worthy of the Plain English Society's gobbledegook prize and the CVCP's lawyers advise that it could still be used by ministers to interfere with individual institutions or groups of institutions."

[Mr. Edward O'Hara]

The CVCP still regards the issue as not yet having been satisfactorily determined.

It is evident to me from the debate on Second Reading and from many contributions in this debate that the first eight sittings of the Committee will be more than adequately occupied by the business of clauses 1 to 14 and schedule 2. There will be no spare time in those sittings to allocate to business on the 70 or so other clauses.

I know that it has been said that the Opposition accept many of the Bill's provisions for higher education. I am happy to agree with that, but my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) said that he smelt a rat. I am sure that the dramatic pointing of his arm was a rhetorical and not a demonstrative gesture. I, too, smell a rat—in clause 66. I wonder how many other rats should be smelt out but will not be because the time available is inadequate to scrutinise the details of the Bill.

The CVCP says that it is claimed that clause 81 is

> "a power of last resort to provide for a proper level of accountability for public money."

That is an important issue of principle in the way that we conduct the business of the House. At the moment, these powers are subject to the negative procedure, and the CVCP, and I am sure all responsible Members of Parliament, regards it as important that such powers be subject to affirmative resolution.

All this shows that, if the guillotine motion is agreed, the time allocated to the Bill will be inadequate to allow debates on the many important issues in it that need still to be examined. I offer the Secretary of State some advice. There is a story in Greek mythology that Odysseus, when he came home after 10 years of warfare in Troy and 10 years of tribulation and storm at sea, and decided that he wanted some peace, took an oar from his ship and walked inland. When, eventually, a local said to him, "What are you doing carrying a winnowing fan on your shoulder?" he decided that there was the place to settle down in peace.

Many teachers, at all levels, who are suffering under the Government would dearly love to walk inland wearing their mortarboards and stop when someone offered to buy them so that they could be used to plaster walls. My advice to the Secretary of State is that he roll up this Further and Higher Education Bill and walk away with it. When, eventually, someone comes up to him in agitation and asks him why he is carrying round—I will not be polite and call it a toilet roll, but will call it something even more insulting—a Tory tabloid newspaper, he should then take out the Bill, look at it and re-examine its purpose and its value.

12.37 am

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): As this is supposed to be a debate, I shall refer to three speeches from Tory Members, although none of those who made them is here to listen to any debating points that I may make.

The first is the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens), who claimed that the advantage of the timetable motion was that the Bill could be chopped up into little bits, thereby allowing adequate time to consider each item. If he examined the motion, he would discover that it is not like that at all, and that it is possible for 96 clauses and eight schedules to be dealt with on 26 February, finishing at 9.30 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): The hon. Gentleman might like to know that the precise timetabling was arranged at the request of the Opposition, who asked that 80 per cent. of the available time should be spent on the first 14 clauses.

Mr. Barnes: It is quite possible to provide a considerably longer period and still allocate 80 per cent. of the time to those clauses. If more days were available in advance of the remaining 20 per cent. of the time, the matters to which I have referred would be much more likely to be brought up.

Mr. Haynes: What my hon. Friend is saying may fit a rumour that is flitting around the House. The rumour, which I heard last night, is that the Government are considering going to the country before 9 April. In fact, it goes further; it says that they will go without a Budget. If my hon. Friend thinks about that, he will see the need for this timetable. *[Laughter.]* As I speak, a member of the Cabinet is laughing his head off. There is something going on. As I told my hon. Friend earlier, there is a rat in this Chamber, and it is running around like hell.

Mr. Barnes: Obviously, my hon. Friend has smelt two rats.

The second contribution to which I want to refer was that of the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), who said that there was no great dispute over part II of the Bill, which deals with higher education. So far as the end of the binary divide is concerned, that is certainly true, but it is an argument for excluding part II from the provisions of the timetable. Part II could be considered seriously and at greater length.

The Transport and Works Bill was not divided upon. When that measure went into Committee, some time was spent on it, and a considerable number of amendments emerged. Although Members wanted to improve it, there was no division about the general principles. In the case of this Bill, a similar situation could be created if a particular element of it were excluded from the timetabling arrangements.

The third Member to whom I want to refer is the Leader of the House, who said that he was in favour of automatic timetabling. I am afraid that we might be pushed into automatic timetabling, the abolition of Friday sittings, and a rising time of 7 pm. In those circumstances, what would 650 Members do, especially if Committee debate were timetabled? Perhaps the number of Members would have to be greatly reduced. I can envisage difficulties. If each Member were to have a constituency twice as big as his current one, he would need better facilities.

We are now in a silly season, when electioneering is to the fore in the House. I realise that, in one sense, what goes on in the House is a continuation of the hustings. It is right that it should be so, but I am concerned about the extent and the triviality of such debate. The extended campaigning gives rise to certain legislative worries.

We are faced with two extremes. Either business is rushed, as this Bill is being rushed, to fit in with some future timetable, or we scrape around for things to do in the remaining time, and the Government often put matters forward simply as part of a media circus that is organised elsewhere—a circus in which the Government present the issues that form the basis of their campaign.

Rushed debates led to the farce of the council tax, and now further and higher education are threatened by a timetable motion. The Government must have strong reasons for wishing to impose a guillotine at such an early stage. As I have said, we move from one extreme to the other, with the result that many Members have lost interest in what is taking place in the House. Last night, for example, without the Democratic Unionist and Ulster Unionist parties coming to the Government's rescue, they would have lost their Northern Ireland industrial relations order.

It seems fantastic that we are considering a guillotine motion on of all things a Further and Higher Education Bill. Surely a well-organised society should look towards further and higher education. It should see the education process from nursery education on to primary and secondary education and onwards as something that is preparing people for later stages in their life, when they can fully develop within further and higher education.

Education cannot be rushed, despite what the Government think. They think, for example, that at Ruskin college and Northern college, two-year courses can be chopped by one year so that twice as many students can pass through the system, with results that are twice as good. By chopping courses in two we kill that which existed. It is not half of a two-year course that takes place in one year, because the second year is based considerably on what took place in the first. Education cannot be confined to modules and rushed forward. People need time to mature within education institutions, provisions and arrangements.

That principle should apply to the consideration of education legislation, and especially that which is directed to further and higher education. On Second Reading, the Secretary of State talked for a while about the principles and philosophy of education. He suggested that people move into and out of education and back again, and that there was a continuing process. He said that that was extremely beneficial. If he is to adhere to that approach, there should be serious consideration of a measure that will attract masses of representations.

When we deal with education, there will always be many outside with backgrounds in education who will send briefs and write letters to us. They will wish to acquaint us with their views, and they tend to be among the most articulate members of our society. They have many important ideas to present and consideration of education Bills is better when dialectical debate and argument can take place. The outcome is improved understanding.

I doubt whether the Secretary of State fully appreciates what the principles of education should involve from the perspective of democratic socialism, to which I adhere. We should look for three main elements, one of which is individual self-fulfilment. That enables individuals to move into and out of vocational and non-vocational education, for example, to pick up what is beneficial to them at different stages of life. Education is a continuing process, and students and teachers should see themselves as studying together. Are we really producing legislation that will point us in that direction? Given time, could not enough amendments be tabled for us to improve the Bill?

Secondly, education should supply skills that the population in general can use if we are to become a modern, technologically advanced society, with the social requirements that go with that. Specific skills may be involved in some instances, but they should operate, and be controlled, within the general pattern of developing a bright population, who are given an opportunity to study the subjects that grab them.

Mr. Haynes: My hon. Friend has given this matter real consideration. I know the contribution that he has made to the education system over many, many years.

The population of this nation are now living far longer. Many of my constituents who have retired and are now on pensions wish to educate themselves further, and that is something that we should address on the Floor of the House and in Committee. Conservative Members are not bothered; they are pushing the Bill through like nobody's business. I give credit to the hon. Members who have spoken against the Bill tonight: they are being honest with themselves, and with their constituents.

We shall need time for a proper debate in Committee. In tonight's debate, I have heard no mention of the group of elderly people in our nation who wish to educate themselves further. Some, indeed, would want to enter higher education if they were able to do so. This lot are stopping even that happening, let alone stopping us having an opportunity to debate the Bill properly by tabling this damned timetable motion.

Mr. Barnes: There is a widespread movement in favour of a "university of the third age" for people over 50 who have organised themselves and formed a link with educational institutions. Increasing numbers of retired people will want to develop skills and make use of abilities that have been acquired over a lifetime. We should be able to discuss such matters properly and fully in Committee.

If the Opposition table amendments in Committee, how much time will we have to deal with them? Some items may tie in with part II of the Bill, which deals with higher education; but, as only 20 per cent. of the available time has been devoted to the subject, we may not be able to deal with it adequately.

My third point about the importance of further and higher education relates to the skills that can be developed to allow democratic participation in society. Education is not just for individuals; it does not simply mean that someone is producing something that is economically worth while for the rest of us. It is important because of its collective, participatory, sharing nature. Measures that seek to undermine democratic moves and controls, and the role of local education authorities, seem to me entirely contrary to the spirit of education philosophy. The Secretary of State put his toe in the water on that issue, but he has not sought to develop it. We need much more time to discuss these serious matters before the Bill goes into Committee.

12.54 am

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): This is the second time in two weeks that the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Leader of the House have sought to guillotine education Bills. The Government have no mandate for either Bill and there has been little enthusiasm for either, even from Conservative Members. Indeed, in some respects, there has been extensive Conservative opposition to both Bills. The hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) stated his opposition in uncompromising terms, saying that the Bill "stinks" and that he has no intention of voting for it or for the guillotine

[Mr. Jack Straw]

motion. That view was reflected in the speeches of many of his hon. Friends. It is my belief that if there were an opportunity for Conservative Members to vote on the Bill according to their judgment, rather than according to their Whips, the Secretary of State would barely have a majority on his side, let alone in the House as a whole, for the Bill.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) said in his fine speech, democracy is about giving rights to those with whom one disagrees. Democracy is about the rights of minorities, as well as of majorities. Democracy withers if the House fails to give a proper opportunity to speak to those who disagree with those who are in power.

The guillotine means that there will be a wholly inadequate opportunity to examine the Bill in Committee and to improve its terms. It is no good the Secretary of State or the Minister of State saying that the Opposition have agreed to the timetable within the overall framework of the guillotine for the allocation of time between clauses. That is correct, but the Secretary of State and the Minister will also confirm that the last thing to which we agreed was this guillotine. They know that very well, and they also know that, if they had sought our agreement to the guillotine, we should never have agreed to one covering five consecutive sittings, spread over two weeks.

Another reason why the measure is unnecessary is that the Minister of State and the Secretary of State have every reason to know that, on every education Bill on which I have served, apart from the very long Education Reform Bill at the beginning of this Parliament, there has been agreement between Opposition and Government about a voluntary timetable for getting Bills out of Committee. If the Government had come to us, there is no reason on earth why we would not have agreed to such a timetable on this Bill.

Another reason why the Bill should be given more time is to give the Secretary of State the time to visit one or two sixth form colleges and further education colleges to find out about the nature of the services that they offer, their relationships with the local authorities and why, contrary to what he thinks, there is extensive opposition to a centralised takeover of further education.

Mr. Eggar *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: The Minister of State shakes his head. As at 24 July, the Secretary of State had visited only one further education college and one sixth form college throughout his period in office. There is a—*[Interruption.]* Well, there is a further education college slap bang in the middle of the Secretary of State's constituency. It is called the South Nottinghamshire further education college. How many times has the Secretary of State visited that college?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have not been there since I have been Secretary of State, but I have visited it and know it well. I visited a sixth form college last Friday. The hon. Gentleman, who has no education policy and little view on most of the Bills that we consider, scratches around in the statistics of my visits. I visited a sixth form college last Friday and another one before Christmas. A poll of principals shows that 62 per cent. agree with us, with only 21 per cent. agreeing with the hon. Gentleman. Having no policy and no clear views of what the Labour party would do, the hon. Gentleman would obviously spend his time as Secretary of State—if he ever got to that office—swanning around, doing photo-calls, visiting schools and colleges all over the country. We have a job of work to do. All the polls show that the Bill is supported by the principals of the colleges, which are regularly visited by me and by the remainder of my team of Ministers.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman has given way and he ought to take a little time while I respond, as he invited me to do, to think about what he is going to say about the guillotine motion and the contents of the Bill.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State admits that he has not bothered to visit the further education college in his constituency at any time since he became Secretary of State. I will tell him something else. The college in his constituency has no recollection of his having made a visit at any time in the past four years. Indeed, some people cannot remember a visit in the past 10 years.

If the Secretary of State criticises me for visiting schools and colleges, it is a criticism that he should also level at his predecessors, both the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), who is now Lord President of the Council, and the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker). To do them justice, they went out to find out what was happening in the education service. The reason why the Secretary of State has made so many errors in education policy, which will damage the Conservative party grievously at the election, is that he does not understand what goes on in the education service——

Mr. Clarke *rose*——

Mr. Straw: No, the Secretary of State will have his time to reply.

Mr. Clarke *rose*——

Mr. Straw: Sit down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State does not understand the education service. He does not visit it. He takes no notice of it. That is how he blundered into the privatisation of the inspectorate and into dismembering the adult education service. It is also why he is creating a binary divide between further education colleges and sixth form colleges and other sixth form provision at precisely the time that he is adopting Labour party policy to end the binary system in higher education.

In his reply to the Second Reading debate, the Minister of State came out with some puerile nonsense about east European regimes. One of the characteristics of such regimes was that they had weak local authorities and authoritarian central Governments. That sounds to me like a description of this Conservative Administration and where it would like to go. It is also a description of the way in which the Government operate in the dying days of this Administration before the election.

The House knows that there will be inadequate opportunity to debate the detail of the measures on further and adult education within the terms of the guillotine. The only reason that the Government seek to force the guillotine through is the imminence of the general election, which at last the Prime Minister may have the guts to call by 9 April. The Bill and the guillotine will be one more reason why the Government will be defeated whenever the election comes.

1.2 am

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): As everyone has expressed personal views about procedure, may I say that I am not a great supporter of guillotine motions. I do not go so far as my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), who said that he was always against them. They are undoubtedly required by all Governments to get essential business through. Personally I am not in favour of timetabling all Bills on all occasions. I have considerable sympathy with the views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) and by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who expressed reservations about the sudden rush to reform our procedures.

However, I realise that there are cases in which the timetabling of a Committee's proceedings in due course enables every part of the Bill to be debated at adequate length. Like the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, I find myself from time to time speaking on guillotine motions, although I have never rivalled his record of moving five guillotine motions in a day, as he did when he was Leader of the House.

On some occasions guillotine motions have to be tabled and sometimes they are fiercely contested. As someone who is not keen on guillotine motions, I have found myself replying to two debates on guillotine motions recently. One was on the Education (Schools) Bill, with which the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) dealt at some length. The other is on the Further and Higher Education Bill this evening. They are among the least fiercely contested guillotines that I can remember, and both arose in rather curious circumstances—almost by accident.

Last week we were dealing in a day with the Report and Third Reading of the Education (Schools) Bill for which the Opposition had asked for only one day. It became clear during the course of the evening that some Opposition Members were filibustering but others were not. The Opposition Front Bench appeared to veer round during the evening. It also became clear that the Opposition Front Bench spokesmen did not know why they were filibustering . The result was that we moved a guillotine motion at 10 o'clock in the evening to get back to some sensible discussion and spent two days in the House dealing with the matter compared with the one day which the Opposition had previously asked for.

Today's situation is rather unusual, but it is clear that, with the generous timetable that has been laid down, we can have a more ordered discussion in Committee than we might otherwise have had.

We all know the background. This Parliament has a limited amount of time to run. That has been spotted by the Opposition, who took the unusual step of advertising the fact in *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) made it clear that the Opposition's intention was that, because of the imminence of the general election, the higher education provisions of the Bill—supported by his party—were on offer, and could be got through. He also made it clear that the further education parts of the Bill would be filibustered for as long as was necessary to ensure that they did not get through. I cannot think of a clearer invitation—to save everybody from a great deal of wasted time in Committee, debating the sittings motion and initial clauses—to have a timetable motion to allow some orderly debate.

Mr. Fatchett: If the Secretary of State reads my comments in that report, he will see that there is no mention of filibustering on our part. As we said in the debate, we accept the principle of the higher education provisions and we want to debate the further education provisions. There is room for extensive debate on the latter. The Secretary of State seems to be suggesting that, if Members object to any of his provisions, they simply do not have the right to debate them.

Mr. Clarke: I agree that the word "filibuster" was not used by the hon. Gentleman. When I filibustered in opposition, I never described it as filibustering, certainly not in advance of the start of the debate.

In the supplement the hon. Member for Leeds, Central made a noble offer. He said:

> "We would do all we could to facilitate the dropping of FE clauses, subject to certain objectives concerning quality control and academic freedom in higher education."

I have to warn the Opposition and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who will be serving on the Committee that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has provided a most generous allocation of time. Indeed, it is a staggeringly generous allocation of time, which I confidently predict that the Opposition will have considerable difficulty in filling, because they agree with half the Bill. They are not opposed to the higher education part of the Bill. It is no wonder that they have asked that 80 per cent. of the time should be devoted to the first 14 clauses because they have scarcely made a speech all day about the remaining clauses, which do not concern many hon. Members.

For example, the Opposition have had difficulty in sustaining the debate on the guillotine motion. The hon. Member for Knowsley, South did his duty. He has been speaking frequently on these occasions. He spoke at great length on the Education (Schools) Bill last week. He read an out-of-date brief from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. He got the wrong clause of the Bill—he was using the clause before it was amended in the House of Lords, which, in my experience, falls prey to lobbies easily. But no one there read out the brief—or certainly not an out-of-date brief. That is now clause 68.

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals' amendment has been accepted. As far as I am aware, it drafted the clause. When I spoke on Second Reading I said that we would not try to reverse it, and that battle is long over. It occupied 15 minutes of the guillotine debate, which was interesting for the record and for future historians, but it did not seem to show that there is a huge number of issues to be debated seriously.

Hon. Members will see from the Order Paper that the debate in Committee will be open-ended for the first four days. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) leapt up to say that, of course, the Government Whip could bring the debate to an end at any time. He would be horrified if I told him that the Government Whip would not do so but would give the Opposition four all-night sittings. They would never be able to sustain that.

I agree that serious issues have been raised about adult education, in particular, and community colleges, which

[Mr. Clarke]

were adverted to by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr), the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and others. I spoke about adult education on Second Reading, and I would be out of order if I were to dilate on our case now. We have not altered the policy on adult education. We have not altered the legal duties of local authorities towards the courses described, and we are not threatening their source of money. Nevertheless, I accept that serious points must be made.

However, I could not accept the seriousness of the oddest point, which was raised by the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright). He appeared to believe that all our proposals were something to do with saving money. We are certainly not expanding the provision for further and higher education in anticipation that the cost of that provision will drop.

The powers of the further education funding council and the methods by which it will be possible for community colleges to go first to a further education college and then, perhaps, to that council to look for funds are covered in the initial part of the Bill. The Opposition have, with respect, been sensible in asking that the one knife that is included in the guillotine motion falls where it does.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough remains opposed to the Bill. I hope that our Committee discussions will persuade him because four days will be available for debate on clauses 1 to 14 and schedule 2, which establish the new framework. Therefore, there will be plenty of opportunity for amendments to be tabled and considered on the main clauses concerning the structure of adult education—clauses 3, 5, 6(5), and 11 and schedule 2. The first to the eighth sittings of the Committee are open ended.

Sir John Farr: I realise the opportunity that exists, but it can be of no interest to me unless my right hon. and learned Friend can give me an undertaking that I am likely to be selected to serve on the Committee. I have heard from the usual channels that that is unlikely.

Mr. Clarke: That is not within my gift. I am sure that my hon. Friend's comment has been noted, but, before he volunteers, I should point out to him the amount of time that will be taken up on the Committee. Were all the time described in the motion to be occupied, the members of the Standing Committee would be droping exhausted from the tedium of the repetition of important arguments that we have covered over many hours today.

This is a sensible way to proceed for the reasons that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House gave. We have our divisions of opinion on the Bill, but they are not as wide as people claim. We are totally agreed on higher education, and hon. Members on both sides of the House want to expand further education. No hon. Member wants to do any damage to adult education, of which we are all in favour. We are arguing about whether it is right to take further education colleges and sixth form colleges out of local government control.

Given the management of the change and the expansion that I have already described, delay can be damaging. The worst thing that can happen to the institutions, which we are all purporting to support, would be another 12 months of uncertainty, delay, doubt and political debate. The House must debate the issues in a reasonable time, but we simply cannot afford to drag out the debate for ever because it will have an debilitating effect on the institutions.

For reasons of good policy, and in the interests of the education service, for which we have all expressed our support, we should proceed with the Bill with reasonable expedition. The guillotine is generous. It arises in curious circumstances and it is nothing like the ferociously fought guillotines of the past when they right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent really got worked up on the subject, either in support of or in opposition to the guillotine—depending on from which side of the House he spoke. I therefore suggest that the House gives a reasonably peaceful approval to this sensible guillotine motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 269, Noes 182.

Division No. 78] [1.13 am

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan

Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*

Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Farr, Sir John
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred

Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan

Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
She[illegible]an, Barry
Shel[illegible] Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:—

Committee

1.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House on or before 26th February 1992.

(2) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on 26th February may continue until 9.30 pm., whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before those proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 27th February.

2.—(1) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated—

(a) shall meet on 18th, 19th, 20th, 25th and 26th February; and

(b) on each of those days shall sit at [illegible] past Ten o'clock and half-past Four o'clock.

(2) The proceedings to be taken on each of those sittings shall be as shown in the second column, and shall be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the third column, of the following Table:—

TABLE

Sitting	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
1st	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2	—
2nd	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
3rd	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
4th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
5th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
6th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
7th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	—
8th	Clauses 1 to 14 and Schedule 2 so far as not disposed of	Midnight
9th	Remaining proceedings	
10th	Remaining proceedings so far as not disposed of	9.30 p.m.

Report and Third Reading

3. The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

Procedure in Standing Committee

4.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any Order relating to the sittings of the Committee until the proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No Motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a member of the Government, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the member who moves, and from a member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

5. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which Clauses, Schedules, new Clauses and new Schedules are taken in the Standing Committee.

Conclusion of proceedings in Committee

6. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

7. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be moved in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time on allotted days

8. If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Private Business

9. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

10.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed to the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or that Motion is made by a member of the Government;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the beginning to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(4) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that motion.

Supplemental orders

11.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a Member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

12. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which this Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by this Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

13.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation etc.

14.—(1) In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*.

(2) Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) and Standing Order No. 103 (Business sub-committees) shall not apply to this Order.

STILL-BIRTH (DEFINITION) BILL [Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Still-Birth (Definition) Bill, it is expedient to authorise any increase in the sums payable out of money provided by Parliament under any other enactment, being an increase which is attributable to provisions of that Act altering the meaning of "confinement" for the purposes of statutory maternity pay.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

PETITION

Mr. John Hall

1.25 am

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I beg leave to present a petition of some 10,000 signatures on behalf of the case of my constituent, John Hall, who lives at 35 Shetland road, Leicester. Mr. Hall served as a nuclear test veteran on Christmas island in the 1950s. As the House knows, the matter has been raised on several occasions during our proceedings. Some 10,000 people support his claim for compensation. The petition is directed at the Prime Minister in the hope that he will further investigate the claims of Mr. Hall and the other nuclear test veterans.

The petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House call upon the Prime Minister, John Major, and his Government to act upon his recent pledge to investigate further the claim for compensation along with that of other Christmas Island test veterans for ill health caused by those tests.

Although we recently had a letter from the Prime Minister, the campaign goes on and the petition is presented in support of it.

To lie upon the Table.

Hospitals (Allocation Formula)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

1.26 am

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise with the Under-Secretary of State for Health the formula for the allocation of funds to hospitals and area health authorities in places of great deprivation. *[Interruption.]* I do not know what the little conversation on the Government Front Bench is about, but as this is likely to be the last time that I shall speak in an Adjournment debate I should appreciate the attention of the Minister for the Arts as well as the Under-Secretary in this debate.

As I am concerned about Dudley Road hospital, where in the past 12 months I have had three periods of hospitalisation, I get a sense of satisfaction in raising this matter on its behalf. I may be performing a service to it. It carries an enormous weight of care for people in deprived circumstances, and it deserves every possible support. I am glad to pay tribute to the excellence of the work of the surgeons, physicians, nurses and ancillary staff, without whom we would be in serious difficulty in the city of Birmingham.

The debate arises because of the Government's crazy attempt to rationalise health service expenditure in a way that seeks to take money from areas of the greatest deprivation to build up other districts with nothing like similar social problems. As we are talking about the health of thousands of people, that is not only financially unjustified but morally indefensible.

I am concerned about the effect of this recently imposed formula, particularly as it affects West Birmingham health district. I have had correspondence with the Secretary of State about it and I appreciate the courteous way in which he replied, although I am raising this matter now because I am not altogether happy that the situation will be rectified, particularly as it affects Dudley Road hospital.

This matter affects not just hospitals in Birmingham. I understand that other hospitals and health authorities serving inner-city areas of deprivation are equally affected: in Wandsworth, Camberwell, Southwark, central Manchester, north Manchester and Hackney, among others. I learned today that those authorities are coming together at the end of the month to discuss this common problem, which now affects many hospitals and health authorities.

I have to acknowledge that, as a result of recent protests, there have been some changes in the formula concerning births, and I welcome that. There have been adjustments, I am told, to provide a 2 per cent. improvement at Dudley Road hospital. Although that hospital will be 2 per cent. better off under this formula, it will still be 20 per cent. worse off overall. The hospital believes that it will lose £15 million a year, which will be an absolute disaster. Anyone making proposals to take away such a large amount of money from such a hospital must be out of his mind, and I hope that the Government will give urgent consideration to that matter.

As I said, Dudley Road is a wonderful hospital, and it serves an area with the highest deprivation in the country. I have had three spells in the hospital in the past three months and one cannot lie in the vascular surgery ward that I was in without seeing the tremendous devotion of the staff. There was not one moment when I saw an empty bed. I do not know what the Minister for Health is thinking about when she suggests that people are lingering on unnecessarily in hospital wards. That is totally contrary to my experience.

I do not believe that the Minister who is to reply tonight, and for whom I have a high regard, would ever say such a thing. The only people who ought not to have been in a hospital ward when I was there were people for whom the authorities could find no other place. That is regrettable, but we know that it happens, because we do not have sufficient halfway accommodation to deal with it.

What is this formula, which I can only describe as a lunatic formula? It is based on a 10-year population forecast. That in itself, because of population movements in inner cities, renders it very suspect. It certainly ought not to be the basis on which one then calculates funds for hospitals for the next 10 years. Funding should be based on the known workload of each hospital.

The formula for West Birmingham is estimated according to a 3 per cent. reduction in the size of the population, but the grant now applied to Dudley Road hospital is for a 20 per cent. reduction. That illustrates my point about the stupidity of the formula.

Then there is what has come to be known as the mortality factor, which takes us almost to the crux of the matter. Under the formula, a payment is made to the health authority based on estimated population and age. The authority receives £149 per head for people between 45 and 64. For people between 75 and 85, the amount is £927 per head, while for people aged 85 or above it is £1,452 per head. I presume that those amounts reflect the fact that people who live to an advanced age are likely to require more medical attention, but as I saw for myself at Dudley Road hospital, that is a complete fallacy.

In deprived areas people die much younger. I was appalled to learn that the majority of deaths in Dudley Road hospital are of people below the age of 65. They die as a result of all sorts of illnesses, which I shall shortly describe, and all the patients suffering from those diseases need considerable care and attention. The cost of looking after them, even though they die at a comparatively early age, is just as great as the cost of looking after more elderly people.

For diabetes, there are 8·1 deaths per 1,000 people in the West Midlands region. In the West Birmingham region, at Dudley Road hospital, the figure is 18·1 per 1,000. That means that the load at Dudley Road is 133 per cent. higher than the average. For tuberculosis, which unfortunately is making a recurrence, there is one death per 1,000 people in the West Midlands region, whereas at Dudley Road the figure is 4·7 per 1,000, which is 370 per cent. above the average.

For liver disease, there are 146·8 deaths per 1,000 in the West Midlands region, but in the Dudley Road hospital area 164·3 people per 1,000 die from such diseases, which is 12 per cent. above the average. For strokes, there are 36·6 deaths per 1,000 in the West Midlands region and 41·4 per 1,000 in the health district covered by Dudley Road hospital, an increase of 13 per cent. on the average. There are 30·9 suicides per 1,000 of the population in the West Midlands region, but the figure for the Dudley Road hospital area is 44·5 per 1,000 which is 44 per cent. above the average.

For gastric cancer, the corresponding figures are 113 and 133 per 1,000 of the population, 20 per cent. higher than the average. For colon cancers, the figures are 106 and 120 per 1,000, an increase of 14 per cent. For lung cancers, the figures are 97 and 119 per 1,000, an increase of 22 per cent. There are other astonishing and tragic figures. For example, in the Nechells ward in my constituency, the infant mortality rate is 22 per 1,000 live births. That is a terrible figure, and the highest rate in Europe. It grieves me to relate that information at a time when I am about to leave the service of the House.

All that arises from deprivation. Unemployment is well over 30 per cent. I have corresponded with the Secretary of State on the matter and, to be fair, he has not challenged any of the figures. Therefore, I assume that they are accurate and are accepted. What we need, in order to make sure that funds move to where deprivation causes great social and health problems, is some sort of index of deprivation. I am told that there was such an index, called the Jarman formula, which attempted to assess the level of deprivation, and I should like to know why it has been disregarded under this new formula.

West Midlands regional health authority, and particularly its chairman, Sir James Ackers, shares my concern. I have criticised Sir James many times on aspects of health policy, but I must pay tribute to him here: I am sure that he is well seized of the importance of the matter, and he has assured me today that he will do his level best to see that Dudley Road hospital does not lose out in the new formula. For the year 1992-93, because the Government have made some more money available, which I acknowledge, the region has used the extra money to change the formula so that Dudley Road loses no money this year; but there is as yet no guarantee about future years—which is one of the main reasons for this debate. Nor is there any adjustment that can be made internally, as far as I can see, for what I would term the "fairness" factor to come in, so as to allow Dudley Road not only to maintain the present level of funding but to have the sort of increase that it needs for technological and staffing reasons, to keep on all fours with the expansion that may occur at other hospitals, something that seems to me perfectly reasonable. At present, we have a one-year solution.

In Birmingham yesterday the Secretary of State himself was speaking. He was asked about this matter and he told Dr. Iles of Dudley Road hospital, as reported in the *Evening Mail*, that health managers did not have to be "formula bound". I am pleased to hear that because it is good news for us in the west midlands. We have not been told before that the regions can depart from this national formula. In a way, that itself is a bit of a nonsense, because if regions can depart from the national formula—if they can, I am sure that in the West Midlands region they will do so, to benefit Dudley Road hospital—it must mean that they will have to take money away from other people who currently expect to receive more; there must be a readjustment within the region. Although I welcome what the Secretary of State has said, I hope that he understands the wrath that he will bring down on his head from other hospitals that will find their formula readjusted.

If the Secretary of State is right—I am sure that he is —I must now call on the chairman and members of West Birmingham district health authority to declare at once that they will take advantage of this statement and make it clear that they will readjust their own formulas to take much greater account of the effects of deprivation as it applies to Dudley Road hospital and West Birmingham health authority than they have done hitherto.

There is one other matter that concerns me, and I am glad that the Under-Secretary of State for Health is present because I have to take him to task. Although I do not relish the opportunity of doing so, I have to take it. It arises from the speech that he made in replying to the last health debate that we had in the House. In the very last moments of that speech, at about five minutes to 10, he suddenly and with great relish read out a list of hospitals related to the constituencies of his right hon. and hon. Friends, all of which, he told the House to the accompaniment of great cheers from the Government Benches, would benefit from the adjustment of allocations. They all happened to be in marginal Tory seats.

I had not previously put the Minister in the same category as Machiavelli, but as he has exposed himself in that way, I think that we are entitled to ask him for an explanation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): We shall call the right hon. Gentleman's constituency a marginal Tory seat.

Mr. Howell: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would do so if he came to have a look at it. I cannot see any of these unfortunate mothers who are losing their babies at such a rate endorsing the Conservative party in view of that factor.

The reason why the Minister made this extraordinary statement has become apparent to me—it is called development addition. That factor has appeared in the figures of Birmingham regional hospital development board, which makes adjustments. One of the Tory marginal seats to which the Under-Secretary referred was that of Dudley. Under this development addition, Dudley Road hospital, Birmingham, gets an extra £96,000 and Dudley gets £3,138,000. That is disproportionate. The Minister may not have had time to look at this, so perhaps he will write to me about it, because there is considerable concern about development addition, which is one of the matters at which the regional health authority must look when it examines the new opportunities before it.

That is the case that I make tonight on behalf of my constituency and the Dudley Road hospital, of which I was chairman for 12 years and at which I was a patient. I wish to represent them as adequately as I can.

1.46 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) began his speech by observing that this was likely to be the last occasion on which he addressed the House in an Adjournment debate, so it falls to me to say that the House will miss him when he moves on to other things. My first memories of the right hon. Gentleman were when I was a parliamentary candidate, and he was the expert first in the sun and then in the snow—or the other way around. He was a well-known figure throughout the country.

Tonight, the right hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to the fact that he has a long history of interest in the affairs of Dudley Road hospital and the hospital provision for his constituency. Therefore, he speaks not only with great authority but with a background of knowledge in the

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

health service that goes back a long way further than mine. Conscious of that, I approach the subject with due trepidation.

The right hon. Gentleman has concentrated the attention of the House on an issue that is of real importance in the management not just of West Birmingham district health authority but the whole of the national health service, because it is central to the core activity of the NHS that we seek to secure equal access to health care for all our people, whether they come from the relatively leafy areas of Berkshire or Sussex or the more deprived areas of inner-city Birmingham. The formulae that help to determine the allocation of funds within the health service have an important part to play in the practical delivery of that basic objective.

The principle of an allocation formula that reflects a wide range of different pressures including social deprivation is not in dispute. The health service has, throughout the time of the right hon. Gentleman, had a succession of different ways to allocate funds so as to reflect identified need. The RAWP formula—that of the resource allocation working party—was used from 1976, and since the introduction of the health service reforms on 1 April we have changed to the weighted capitation formula. Both were directed to trying to deliver the objective of fair allocation of funds around the health service.

Although the objective is the same, the basis on which we seek that objective under the reformed managment of the NHS is rather different. In the old days, which the right hon. Gentleman will have known in his time as chairman of the hospital board, the health service funded the hospital directly. It was left largely to the local management to use the resources allocated to it to provide patients with the best possible care.

Now, instead of allocating funds directly to specific hospitals, we allocate funds to a health authority, which has an obligation to commission or secure health care for all people resident in its district. I believe that it is true to say that under the old system those who presented themselves at a hospital and knew how to get to the front of the queue tended to get better care than did those who were less skilled at working the system. By setting up powerful purchaser authorities within the health service we are requiring purchasing health authorities to address identified health needs for all groups within their geographic boundaries—something that did not happen previously. One of the key purposes served by that approach is that health authorities are encouraged to use the resources available to them specifically to counteract social deprivation issues such as those the right hon. Gentleman has referred to. The reformed health service seeks first to allocate funds to a purchasing health authority and then to ensure that they are used precisely to address those issues.

Clearly the key to success is the allocation mechanism and the formula that is adopted for the allocation of funds to different purchasing health districts. The formula that we adopt is determined centrally only in so far as it distributes funds from the Department down to regional level. I should like to correct one misinterpretation that the right hon. Gentleman put on recent words of my right hon. Friend. It is not true to say that there is a national formula that regional health authorities are required to observe in the further distribution of funds from regional level to districts. There is a national formula governing distribution from central level to regional level. Below that, it is for the regional health authorities themselves to determine the formula. We have always made that clear. At that level there is not a national formula that may be departed from. Regional authorities may adopt their own formulae for the further distribution of funds to district level.

Mr. Denis Howell: I thank the Minister for making that clear. So far as we are concerned, the statement that he has just made is very profound. The situation has not previously been made clear in the Birmingham region. What I have just heard changes the whole complexion of the situation. It is now clear that our campaign will have to be directed at the regional authority rather than at the Minister or the Secretary of State.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Of course, I am not suggesting that we cut ourselves off from the decisions taken in the West Midlands region. The national health service is accountable, through my right hon. Friend, to this House for all the decisions taken there. Of course, we maintain a watching brief on all the formulae that are operated by the regions. However, we believe it sensible to leave to regional discretion the detail of the regional formulae for further distribution to districts so that it may be flexible and responsive to different circumstances.

I shall deal briefly with the factors which are taken into account in the national formula and which regions are encouraged to take into account in their regional formulae for the distribution of funds. First, and most obvious, the formula has to take account of population and weighted capitation. All the emphasis tends to be on the weighting formulae, but first, and most obvious, it is necessary to take account of movements in total population numbers. One of the influences in west Birmingham is that a fall in the population is taking place, which must in fairness be reflected in the level of funding that goes to the West Birmingham health authority. That will be confirmed or otherwise by the 1991 census, when the figures are available later in the year.

Mr. Dennis Howell: I accept that and I understand the importance of the population formula. The Minister will understand that there is a small reduction in population and that the failure of some to register because of the poll tax may be a significant factor.

Mr. Dorrell: I understand that, but there is a danger of double counting. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys will be making an estimate of the degree of undercounting, and that will be included in the population figures that will be published by the OPCS.

From the specific capitation element of the formula we come to weighting. It is important for the right hon. Gentleman to separate in his mind the age structure element in the weighting, which is introduced to reflect the fact that there is a different level of demand for health-care facilities if someone is over 85 years or over than if someone comes within the five years to 14 years group. We believe that health care facilities for people who are older than 85 are about 17 times more expensive than those for the five years to 14 years group. There is a need to take account of the age structure.

There is a need also to take account of the incidence of illness as a separate factor? There we use standardised mortality as a proxy measure. We recognise that it is an unsatisfactory proxy measure for the incidence of illness.

Finally, we must take into account—this is the factor that the right hon. Gentleman seeks to ensure that we take properly on board—the different ways that are open to us to measure deprivation. Some regions have chosen not to include that element in their formula. The right hon. Gentleman will know that the West Midlands has taken it into account in a particular use of the standardised mortality ratio. We do not regard that as satisfactory, but we regard it as recognition of the importance of taking account of deprivation as a factor——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock on Tuesday evening and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Output

1. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to boost manufacturing output.

The Secretary of State for Trade, Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): The reduction of inflation is the precondition of renewed sustainable growth.

Mrs. Adams: Given that the second Tory recession is set to cost 550,000 manufacturing jobs and 100,000 companies and is set to put the United Kingdom at the bottom of the European Community league table on under-investment and employment in 1992, will the right hon. Gentleman now admit that urgent action is needed to boost employment in Britain to take us out of this situation? Will he also introduce training schemes to put the United Kingdom back where it was before we had a Tory Government and to take it out of this recession?

Mr. Lilley: The key to renewed growth is lower inflation, which in turn makes lower interest rates possible. The interest rates in this country are now down to their lowest differential with those on the continent that we have seen for many years. We certainly do not need higher taxes, a minimum wage and the restoration of trade union power, which would prolong the recession and abort a recovery.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I thank my right hon. Friend for responding so promptly to my request that either his good self or my hon. Friend the Minister for Corporate Affairs should visit Nottingham. I understand that the Minister is planning to visit Raleigh Industries within the next 10 days. That company is the most famous cycle manufacturer in the world, but it is subject to the most unfair dumping of bicycles from China. I hope that the Minister will do all that he can to protect that most famous name in the industry.

Mr. Lilley: I recognise the powerful representations that my hon. Friend has made for industries in his constituency, and particularly the bicycle industry. My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will meet representatives of that industry when he visits Nottingham and will discuss the problems with them. Anything that we can do within the context of European Community trade policy, we will do.

Mr. Gordon Brown: On top of the 2,300 jobs tragically lost at British Aerospace today, the textile and motor trade federations are now predicting 40,000 more job losses this year, the Building Trades Federation predicts that 50,000 more jobs will be lost this year, the Engineering Employers Federation predicts that 70,000 more jobs will be lost, and the Confederation of British Industry has said that 200,000 jobs will be lost in total unless Ministers take action. Has not the Government's last remaining friend, the Governor of the Bank of England, now extinguished the Government's last remaining claims to a pre-election recovery, and is it not the case that, having lost his support, the Government have now nothing left to lose but the election?

Mr. Lilley: I naturally regret the loss of jobs by British Aerospace and other companies, not least those in my constituency. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the press release from British Aerospace today began:

> "The aviation market continues to suffer from the world-wide recession".

The hon. Gentleman, however, continues to deny the existence of that recession, which makes a mockery of those who have lost their jobs as a result of it. British Aerospace has to reach world standards of productivity and efficiency, as it made clear in its press release. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to tell the House of the additional job losses that would follow if Labour's reckless defence cuts were superimposed on the problems already faced by the industry.

The Governor of the Bank of England said that there are firm indications of an upturn coming and that the basis of sustainable growth remains a credible commitment to the goal of price stability. The Labour party could never credibly offer that.

2. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the increase in manufacturing output between 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Lilley: Manufacturing output rose by nearly one fifth between 1985 and 1990.

Mr. Cran: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the United Kingdom is fortunate to have a large proportion of world-beating, world-class companies? That is illustrated by Rolls-Royce, which has quadrupled its share of the jet engine market since 1987 and, even today, by the news of the British Aerospace section, which has a £13 billion per annum order book and in size is second only to that in the United States. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there would not be nearly so many such companies if they had to put up with the economic and industrial policies of the Labour party?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right to mention the strengths of those companies, even when they face difficulties in world markets, and to emphasise the difficulties that they would face at home if a Labour Government were adding to those problems. There has been a tremendous growth in exports in the aerospace industry, as in other industries. We welcome that and will do all we can to sustain and build on it in the future.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Secretary of State confirm that bankruptcies and liquidations, affecting manufacturing as well as other industries, are at record levels not only in the south-east but particularly in Wales and Scotland? Will he also confirm that the fact that those bankruptcies and liquidations are occurring now in high-tech industries is a particularly worrying aspect? Does he agree that there is plenty of venture capital about, but that the venture capitalists do not have the confidence to know where to invest it? How will he instil confidence in the market so that investment in manufacturing industry can really start again?

Mr. Lilley: Confidence will not be instilled by harping solely on the negatives. Naturally we regret any rise in bankruptcies, but let us remember the strengths of British industry, which has increased exports in the past 10 years by more than France, Germany, the United States or Japan—*[Interruption.]* The hon. and learned Gentleman does not like that answer because he wants to talk Britain down.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the motor manufacturing industry is one of the greatest providers of employment in this country? Will he encourage his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to understand that the company car is not a tax-avoidance weapon but an essential tool of British industry and that, if we are to have a strong home-based industry, we do not need taxes so high that Jaguar and Rolls-Royce lose money? If those companies cannot sell their products at home, and if the Government do not encourage them at home, people abroad will not be encouraged to buy them either.

Mr. Lilley: I have always shared with my hon. Friend a belief in the importance of manufacturing industry, particularly the motor car industry. Therefore, like him, I rejoice in the fact that in the last three months of last year the motor car industry earned a surplus on the balance of payments, and exports of motor cars rose by 55 per cent. I shall convey his point to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who also recognises the great importance of a strong and recovering motor car industry.

Dr. Moonie: I notice that the main question carefully ended with the date "1990". Why has manufacturing output fallen faster and further in Britain's economy than in those of any of our competitors in western Europe? Does the Minister not yet realise that the country needs action, not words?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman should remember that manufacturing output fell under the last Labour Government and that it is up under this Government. Compared with 10 years ago, at the same point in the economic cycle, output is up by nearly a quarter, investment is up by a third, manufacturing productivity is up by more than a half and manufacturing exports are up by nearly three quarters. That is a record to be proud of and to build on in the future.

Telecommunications

3. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the attractiveness of the United Kingdom as a location for telecommunications headquarters of internationally mobile companies.

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): The United Kingdom is extremely attractive as a location for inward investment in the telecommunications industry. Recently, US West and IBM have announced that they are to move their business headquarters to the United Kingdom. One of the important characteristics of those moves was the support that it represented for British liberalisation policies. Many more companies will follow as investors.

Mr. Mans: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he confirm that the Government will continue their policy of liberalisation in the telecommunications industry and continue to welcome foreign companies to compete on an equal basis in this country—provided that, in return, our companies can compete in those countries?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is quite right. That is exactly what the Government intend to do. We welcome all sorts of investors here on fair terms. Another feature that we welcome is that manufacturers are now investing here in the manufacture of equipment to supply the telecommunications industry because of the strength of the underlying service provision in this country. How much I welcome NEC, Motorola and the other companies, which make large numbers of mobile phones in this country in response to the strength of the cellular mobile phone market.

Mr. Alan Williams: Is it not strange that, while foreign companies invest in this country, British companies which are aware of the position here have invested £40 billion more overseas than the foreigners have invested here?

Mr. Redwood: Investment both ways is welcome because free trade and free investment flows increase world prosperity. I am delighted that enough large companies in this country have the profits to invest both here and abroad to bring more dividends and income into this country. It is a great testimony to this country that far more of the large, successful companies in Europe are based in Britain than in France or Germany.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Does my hon. Friend agree that the stunning improvement in telecommunications in this country in the past 12 years has been led by British Telecom? Will he confirm that not only has British Telecom invested—this is what the Opposition keep talking about—£20,000 million in new technology, but it has contributed no less than £1,000 million in corporation tax to the Exchequer?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. Much of the major investment in this country's telecommunications infrastructure in recent years has been from BT, which has made a much bigger contribution to the Exchequer than it did in the 1970s, as it is more efficient, more productive, sells more services, makes more money and pays more tax. That is true not just of BT—a large number of other investors are coming on to the market. Some £5 billion is pledged from the cable companies alone, which now have

20,000 telephone service customers. That is just the beginning. Many thousands more will follow. We offer choice, competition and more investment—how different from Opposition policies which would smash profits and investment, and return to a monopoly.

Steel Production

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the figures for steel production in the United Kingdom for the last two years for which figures are available.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): United Kingdom production of crude steel totalled 17·8 million tonnes in 1990 and 16·5 million tonnes in 1991.

Mr. Strang: Is the Minister aware that in Scotland we have gained the impression that while the Secretary of State for Scotland is prepared to have meetings about the industry—such as the one that he had yesterday with the shadow Secretary of State for Industry—the man with the real power in relation to the steel industry, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, is not prepared to lift a finger to help secure a future for steel production in Scotland? Will the Minister answer one straight question? Is the Department of Trade and Industry prepared to do anything to help the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) to try to secure thin slab steel production in Scotland—or are we to be left entirely to the mercy of that virtual private monopoly, the British Steel Corporation?

Mr. Leigh: We would be happy to consider the prospects for thin slab steel production, but unfortunately there has been absolutely no commercial interest in such production. Those are the economic facts of life. As for the Government's position, we are investing £120 million to help the people and economy of north Lanarkshire, including £40 million from this Department. The hon. Gentleman asks what we intend to do. One could well direct that question to the Labour party. Will the Labour party nationalise, subsidise and force British Steel to keep the plant open? The Labour party should put up or shut up.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Is my hon. Friend aware that British Steel's productivity woud be fatally crippled by Labour's absurd proposal to ban coal imports? Is he aware that 50 per cent. of imported coal goes directly to British Steel and that that coal is not currently available in the United Kingdom? Should not the Labour party occasionally pause and think before announcing ridiculous objectives which would cost so many British jobs?

Mr. Leigh: We are extremely worried about that proposal, which was no doubt drawn up on the back of an envelope. British Steel tells us that there is no viable United Kingdom source of metallurgical—grade coal—coking coal. It has to import 100 per cent. of that grade of coal and take advantage of world markets to buy from the cheapest source. The Labour party wants to stop British Steel importing that coal.

British Steel has trebled productivity since 1979. Does the Labour party want to return to the days when British Steel cost the taxpayer £8 billion or £16 billion in today's money. The Opposition must withdrawn their policy, and do so today, or everyone will know what their policies mean for British Steel.

Mr. Salmond: Is the Minister aware that the case for expanded production and investment at the Dalzell plate mill in Lanarkshire is now backed by the Glasgow university study, the Scottish Office, the Scottish Trade Union Congress, the Scottish National party and Motherwell district council, all of whom believe that it is an outstanding plant, given the requisite investment, with a ready market for its enlarged product? Would the Minister be prepared to back such investment and expanded production, provided that the local Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) is prepared to stop rubbishing the plant and its work force?

Mr. Leigh: There is every provision for market investment in this area. If the market wants to back such a scheme the market will back it.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my hon. Friend remind Opposition Members that in the heady days of politician-directed industrial strategy in the 1970s Britain had a deficit on our steel trade of £1 billion per year and British Steel lost £16 billion during that decade, whereas now British Steel is the most efficient steel maker in Europe and we have a surplus on our steel trade of £1 billion per year? If Labour Members are so keen on Ravenscraig staying open, why does the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) not have the guts—or perhaps the influence in the shadow Cabinet—to give an unequivocal commitment that if the Labour party came to power it would keep Ravenscraig open?

Mr. Leigh: I see that the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) is seeking to intervene. The whole House is waiting to hear what the Opposition's policy is. Will they subsidise? Will they nationalise? We want to know now.

Dr. Bray: Is the Minister aware that the proposals for the expansion and development of the Dalzell works have been pursued for many years more consistently and vigorously by the Labour party than by any other party? Is he also aware that British Steel cannot go ahead with its plans for building a new plate mill on Teesside because of the depth of the recession into which the Government have plunged the country? Is he further aware that he is out of date about the commercial interest in thin slab production at Ravenscraig, which has been communicated to the Secretary of State for Scotland but not, apparently, to the Department of Trade and Industry?

Is the Minister aware that substantially lower steel production costs are being achieved by NUCOR with thin slab production in the United States? Will he confirm, in line with undertakings given at the time of privatisation, that he expects British Steel to consider offers for the sale of Ravenscraig on a commercial basis at opportunity cost —at a price which British Steel could expect to get for the plant on world markets?

Mr. Leigh: That was a very interesting academic lecture, but it was absolutely meaningless because I have already said that if there was a market for thin slab production we would welcome that. Once again, despite the smoke-screen, the hon. Gentleman has failed to answer the question to which everyone in Scotland wants an answer. Will Labour subsidise Ravenscraig? Will it nationalise it? Will it force British Steel to keep it open? The Opposition refused to answer that in the recent debate, and they have refused to answer it again today. Their only guiding light is ambition for office, and they refuse to tell the people of Scotland what their policy is. That is disgraceful.

Hosiery and Knitwear

5. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he has taken in the last six months to protect hosiery and knitwear manufacturers from dumped third-world imports.

Mr. Redwood: The United Kingdom Government will pursue vigorously with the EC authorities any dumping cases brought to our attention. In this industry, none has been brought in the past six months. Last year, under different provisions, a temporary ban was imposed on Chinese underwear imports to stop a temporary surge.

Sir John Farr: Is my hon. Friend aware that up to 500,000 jobs in Britain depend on having a sensible, controlled market, and that discipline and control of third world dumped imports can be brought about only if we have a sensible GATT regime? Will my hon. Friend please encourage my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to press to ensure that we have the protection of a new GATT structure as soon as possible?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend has my full assurance. My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Trade are dedicated to pursuing sensible GATT solutions to these problems. The Government fully recognise the importance of the industry that my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough, (Sir J. Farr) so ably represents, and we want proper GATT disciplines for fair trading in this as in other sectors. I hope that our partners in the world economy and the European Community will assist our efforts to achieve speedy resolution of the GATT discussions.

Mr. Cryer: How is it that at the British yarn show held recently in Leicester the chairman of Benson Turner, a firm of spinners in my constituency and an efficient and well-organised company, complained that the Department of Trade and Industry shows inertia and indifference when the industry submits complaints about illegal subsidies and dumping? The chairman called on the Department to take action about those complaints because if it did not do so there would be little industry left to take action about.

Mr. Redwood: I can promise that the Department will take vigorous action where there are good cases. I am advised that no cases came to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade in the past six months. The hon. Gentleman should represent his constituents by writing a letter with specific complaints. We shall then take action to follow it through with the EC authorities.

Mr. Andy Stewart: My hon. Friend will be aware that many of my constituents work in the knitwear industry and are grateful for the steps already taken by the Government. Does he agree that they are at greater risk not from imports but from the minimum wage, which would devastate the knitwear industry?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. The proposals of the Labour party, and some of the proposals in the Maastricht social protocol, would be deeply damaging to the industry. We do not want to see those jobs destroyed. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) might like to remember that in the polyester yarn sector, which is not covered by the question, there are anti-dumping suits going on, so we are pursuing the cases of which we are aware.

Mr. Kirkwood: Is the Minister aware that it is not true that there have been no notifications of dumping in the past six months? Is he aware of the work that the Scottish Knitwear Council has been doing with departmental officials showing that in 1990 a total of 123,000 knitted garments in cashmere coming from China were dumped over the quota agreed? What action is the Department taking to seek compensation and redress so that the overshipments in 1991 and this year are stopped forthwith?

Mr. Redwood: The question from my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) was specific. It asked about six months in a limited industry, and I gave an accurate answer on that. There have been cases in cashmere relating to an earlier period and we are pursuing those actively with the EC authorities. We have to ask whether there was some failure in the mechanism of the quota arrangements, and whether they can be adjusted or whether there needs to be some compensation. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade is actively pursuing that.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are making slow progress. In fairness to those whose questions come further down the Order Paper, I propose now to speed up a bit.

Post Office

6. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the Post Office's negative external financing limit for the year 1992-93.

Mr. Leigh: A negative external financing limit of £66 million has been set for the Post Office for the year 1992-93.

Mr. Hain: Since 1979, the Post Office has contributed more than £1 billion in negative external financing limit payments, at 1991 prices, cutting back on investment and milking the customer. Would it not be far better for the Government to end these punitive and ridiculous double tax payments—the Post Office already pays corporation tax—thus allowing it to concentrate on improving the quality of service to customers rather than pursuing abolition of the second delivery in towns and putting restrictions on rural services such as insisting that people have letter boxes at the bottom of their gardens or, in some cases, making people go to village centres for their letters? Should not the priority be investment to improve the quality of services?

Mr. Leigh: Let us put the matter into perspective. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, I am only trying to answer the question. We are talking about an organisation which has a turnover of £4 billion. It is not unreasonable that, from that, it should give its only shareholder—the Government—a dividend of £65 million per year. If we did not require that dividend, which is spent on hospitals, schools and much else, we would be able to cut only about 1p off the 24p cost of a first-class stamp. This year, the Post Office has a £340 million capital investment programme. The first and second-class delivery services have shown a marked improvement over the past two or three years. The Post Office is a successful and profitable organisation, and I hope that the Opposition wish it to remain so.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that the rural sub-post office is at the heart of the rural community and that it plays an essential role in west Norfolk? Will he do what he can to ensure that as many Government services as possible are available at post offices? For example, why cannot every rural sub-post office have a vehicle relicensing facility?

Mr. Leigh: We are anxious to protect the rural post office network and one of the main purposes of the citizens charter is, through the process of competition, to improve quality and choice within the constraints of an affordable uniform tariff. Therefore, I can assure my hon. Friend, who represents a rural constituency, that we have very much in mind the needs of rural post offices and we shall look with interest at any requests that they make to us for extending their liability to sell other services.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that it is feared in rural areas that a move towards privatisation would lead to services that require subsidies being axed, which would be a body blow to those rural areas and their opportunities for economic development? Can he give any assurance about the future of such services in rural areas?

Mr. Leigh: I have already given such an assurance. I have said that the Government are committed to the maintenance of the uniform tariff structure, about which people in rural areas are concerned. That is the commitment that we have given and by which we stand.

Mucking Flats

7. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to visit Mucking Flats in south-east Essex, to discuss industrial growth in the area.

Mr. Lilley: I shall read this answer with particular care. I have no plans at present to visit Mucking Flats.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, thanks to the Government's progressive policies in privatising the electricity industry, that area of south-east Essex deserves a visit because methane produced by all the muck that comes out of London is being dumped at Mucking Flats, converted into electricity and sold to the national grid, thanks to the enterprise of Cory's, which is in my constituency? Is he further aware that, just up the road from Mucking Flats at Shell Haven, Shell and Mobil are planning to turn their spare gas into electricity? Does not that show that when we introduce private enterprise we turn muck into brass?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend offers me an enticing invitation which I shall consider taking up. This is an interesting plan and I am delighted that my Department has been able to offer a grant to help it. We want to see the environmentally friendly development of electricity. I understand that this scheme will be able to light up a town of about 30,000 people, just as my hon. Friend can today, almost single-handedly, light up her constituency.

Recession

8. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from businesses in the north-west concerning the effects of the recession in industry.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend receives considerable correspondence about the state of north-western business.

Mr. Orme: Will the Minister confirm that since 1979 there has been a 37 per cent. reduction in manufacturing industry in the north-west—a larger proportion than in any other region in the United Kingdom—that last year 16,800 jobs in the manufacturing and engineering industries were lost and that, unfortunately, we foresee more jobs being lost as a result of the statement made by British Aerospace today? Faced with those facts, what action will the Government take? Why do they stand aside as British manufacturing industry is reduced, whereas our main competitors in other countries support their industries?

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend set out the Government's policies some time ago in a clear document that was fully backed by the CBI, which believes that we have the right policies to improve our competitiveness and to take advantage of lower inflation and of business conditions around the world as they improve. In the 1980s, north-western output expanded, as it did nationwide. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier that manufacturing output was up by more than one fifth, and productivity, investment, and exports by much more impressive figures. The CBI stated recently that matters will improve and the Bank of England says that the leading indicator measures point firmly to an upturn in output in 1992.

Sir Peter Blaker: As to British Aerospace, will my hon. Friend give a firm assurance that the Government will continue vigorously to support exports of military aircraft—something which is strongly opposed by many Opposition Members? What is the Government's attitude to Labour's proposal for a defence diversification agency, bearing in mind that if it were so easy to create jobs through a Government agency, it is surprising that Labour has always left behind more unemployed than when it took office.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend is right. The Government will offer all assistance under our policies and programmes to help British Aerospace to export its products. After all, it is orders that businesses need to provide jobs and to guarantee employment. The large defence cuts that Labour proposes would be ruinous to job prospects, and its ham-fisted intervention plans would not work. It would not be easy to effect the transition that Labour suggests by Government sleight of hand. What is required is careful business planning by the managers and directors of the companies concerned.

Mr. Hoyle: Yes, but if the Minister will come into the real world, he will find that redundancies are still occurring. Many of the redundancies at British Aerospace involve white-collar workers, including professional engineers—many of whom are graduates. What future will they have in the recession that continues under the present Government?

Mr. Redwood: The worldwide recession will lift. It is doing so in many parts of the world, and that provides export and job opportunities. Skilled people always have opportunities ahead of them, and I am sure that they will continue to do so under this Government, who have the right economic policies. Those opportunities would be wrecked by the Opposition's policies for commerce and industry.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the work of his Department's deregulation unit.

Mr. Redwood: The Government have a strong programme of deregulatory work. I will announce shortly the work programme for the coming year. Removing or reducing burdens on business is vital to successful enterprise policies.

Mr. Hague: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his work so far. Does he agree that minimising the regulatory burden on business is a worthy objective for any Government? Would not it be a disaster for business throughout the country suddenly to be confronted by a long list of new regulations and constraints? I refer to social audits, contract compliance agencies, work force monitoring, compulsory disclosure of information, minimum wages, equality tribunals and many other Opposition ideas.

Mr. Redwood: That is a forbidding and worrying list for all business people. One of this country's great strengths is that the burdens imposed by the Government on employing people are much lighter than in France and Germany. That is why we enjoy higher inward investment compared with those two countries. Labour Front-Bench spokesmen think that that is amusing. They do not understand the importance of keeping costs under control, and of making sure that the Government do not impede enterprise.

Mr. Flynn: As an apostle of deregulation, will the Minister investigate why British Transport Advertising has banned British Medical Association advertising that seeks to discourage smoking by young people when, at the same time, the tobacco industry spends £300 million on advertising——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that we need visual aids.

Mr. Redwood: I do not see how I can answer the question as I could not see properly the document that the hon. Member was waving.

Mr. Speaker: We proceed here by speech, not by visual aids.

Mr. David Shaw: Can my hon. Friend confirm that when he announces new proposals for deregulation he will ensure that he and his officials have consulted the Minister for small businesses to see that every effort is made to take into account the needs of small businesses and that deregulation, wherever possible, is increased, so that small businesses can get special exemptions where possible from what can be very complicated regulations and procedures that the Government introduce?

Mr. Redwood: I give my hon. Friend that assurance. Much practice in the past year or two has reflected just that process, after a good deal of consultation with small businesses. They have been exempted from certain reporting requirements by my Department under the companies legislation, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer put a lot of measures in last year's Budget to improve the position of small businesses, because tax is revealed to be one of their most noticeable problems when they reply to our consultations.

Ms. Mowlam: When the Minister reviews the business regulations will he consider extending that review to the regulation of financial institutions, in view of the problems with the collapse of Guinness III and the potential collapse of Guinness II, and in view of the serious difficulty with fraud regulation at present, particularly now that only three people will be going to gaol for a shorter time than the whole of the Guinness trial was taken, with one of them, Mr. Ernest Saunders, whose sentence was reduced because of ill health, on the national media this morning in blooming health and protesting his innocence?

Mr. Redwood: I do not intend to comment on individual cases before the courts. The general principle of the Government's policy is clear: we will ensure that people who commit fraud and swindles are brought to book through the courts. My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has recently made statements, and was on the radio this morning, about the review that he is conducting of how court procedures can be improved. The House can rest assured that the Government will take every action possible to bring villains to book. We will not tolerate them.

Recession

10. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the long-term effects of the recession in industry.

Mr. Lilley: British industry is well placed to grow as we recover from the recession.

Mr. Clelland: Does the Secretary of State recall that in the last recession under this Government the collapse of manufacturing industry was said to be making it leaner and fitter to face the future? Ten years on, and having lost more than 150,000 manufacturing jobs in the northern region alone, manufacturing is faced with yet another recession, only this time, far from leanness and fitness, it is faced with malnutrition and is dangerously near the point of no return. With 6,000 manufacturing jobs being lost every week and 1,000 businesses a week going under, what action does he intend to take before more of our industrial capacity is lost altogether?

Mr. Lilley: We are used to the Labour party believing that it can talk up its support by talking the country down.

The hon. Member believes that he should talk down his own region and constituency. I notice that the Newcastle *Journal* has the headline

"North-East bucks the trend with firms taking on more workers",

and I am sure that the hon. Member will be delighted that Vickers in his constituency, making the new tank, has excellent opportunities at home and export prospects abroad. They would be helped by, and I am sure that they would welcome, a positive, upbeat statement from the hon. Member about the revived and renewed prospects for the north-east, which has been transformed not least by inward investment which is threatened by the Front Bench of the Labour party.

Mr. Sumberg: Is my right hon. Friend aware that when the shadow Chancellor recently visited the James Halstead group in my constituency—it employs more than 400 people and is successful in making good profits—he expressed satisfaction to the local media that most of the technology that he saw was British-made and that most of it had been made 20 miles from Bury? Would it not be a good idea if the Opposition actually trumpeted these successes in the British manufacturing industry instead of moaning and complaining and doing British industry down?

Mr. Lilley: Absolutely. I noticed that this did not feature in their party political broadcast, wrongly entitled "Made in Britain" and alleging that virtually nothing was made in Britain, when we not only have the successes mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) in his constituency but export far more television sets than we import and make the best hi-fi in the world, and when one in ten personal computers sold in the world are made in this country—in Scotland.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, since the beginning of 1990, manufacturing investment has fallen by 35 per cent? Will he tell the House why he has rejected the CBI's call for investment incentives and investment strategies?

Mr. Lilley: The CBI urges people not to take a short-term view, as the hon. Gentleman does in considering only a 12-month period. If we take a 10-year view, we see that manufacturing investment is up by a third in comparison with a similar part of the same cycle. I believe that, as we come out of the recession, we shall find that British industry is much stronger than it was during the same period at the beginning of the 1980s, and that it will prosper mightily during the remainder of the 1990s.

"199?" Hotline

1. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries the "199?" hotline has received from small businesses in Essex.

Mr. Leigh: Nationally, calls for January this year have been over 50 per cent. higher than the corresponding period last year, and nearly 120 per cent. higher than in December 1991. Calls to the single market hotline are not necessarily recorded on a geographical basis.

Mr. Amess: Is my hon. Friend aware that, next month, my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) and I shall be visiting the European Commission and Parliament—not only to tell Mr. Delors that he cannot have all the money that he is asking from the British people, but to create business opportunities for our constituents? Does my hon. Friend agree that Basildon, the finest town in the country, is strategically placed to take full advantage of the single market? Of course, my hon. Friend's hotline is available to help my constituents with their inquiries.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend always speaks out powerfully for Basildon: he has done so for the past eight years, and I have no doubt that he will do so for the next eight.

Basildon is indeed well placed to take advantage of the single market, but it is important for companies to be well prepared. It is therefore extremely encouraging that, only this morning, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took the 250,000th call on the single market hotline—and he could give the answer to the caller's question.

Telephone Repairs

12. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will indicate the nature and range of discussions he has had with OFTEL on the length of time customers have had to wait to have their telephones repaired; what changes in waiting time there have been in the last seven years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Government and the Director General of Telecommunications frequently discuss telecommunications policy issues. Ninety-nine per cent. of faults are now repaired in two working days, compared with 87 per cent. in 1985. My hon. Friend may remember that, in 1980, a quarter of a million people had been waiting for more than two months for telephones to be connected. Seven days—a week—is a long time to wait for a telephone service nowadays.

Mr. Dunn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he confirm that our policy of privatisation and the liberalisation of the telecommunications industry has led to lower prices and a better quality of service for the consumer? In the light of that, and of the answer that he has just given, would he care to contrast our policy with that of the Labour party?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right: our policies have been most successful in achieving higher-quality service and lower-priced telephone calls. How welcome that is. Labour's policies, which are partly monopoly and partly over-regulatory, and aim to damage the industry's profits and investments, could only make matters worse. Quality would deteriorate and people would have less choice and therefore a less good service.

Mr. Dalyell: Given the position of such firms as Motorola at Bathgate do the Government recognise that what such firms really want is infrastructure, and that local authorities should be helped to provide it?

Mr. Redwood: All kinds of infrastructure are being provided, both through the expenditure of public moneys under programmes organised by, for instance, the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport, and through the provision of large amounts of private-sector capital in the case of such matters as telecommunications infrastructure. The big surge in investment has been possible only because of the liberalisation policies pursued by the Government. It is being backed up by road programmes and by railway and other investment.

Companies (Government Intervention)

13. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from industrialists urging the Government directly to intervene in the strategic direction and management of companies.

Mr. Lilley: The CBI report "Competing with the World's Best" rejected the notion that Government could or should

"be in the business of picking winers, or of engaging in direct intervention in the strategic direction and management of companies".

Mr. Riddick: Yet is that not exactly what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and his hon. Friends are advocating, through the establishment of a national investment bank and a host of other measures—despite the fact that the hon. Gentleman has never done a day's work in industry in his life? Clearly, the British people do not want a return to the failed interventionist, socialist policies of the 1960s and 1970s—and that is another reason why Labour will be defeated at the next general election.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. It is extraordinary that only last week the Leader of the Opposition confirmed that the Labour party is still wedded to bodies such as the national enterprise board, despite the fact that, of the 102 companies in which that body invested, about 35 went bust, 38 were sold at a loss and only the remainder managed even to return taxpayers' money.

Mr. Graham: Will the Secretary of State have some regard for companies like Lawtex, a firm in my constituency that went into liquidation, resulting in the loss of 120 jobs? Six months later, those people are still waiting for their redundancy payments. Why are the Government sitting on their backsides and failing to see that they are paid now?

Mr. Lilley: With regard to the example that the hon. Gentleman has given, if there is any question of the law of the land not being obeyed I shall ask my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to look into it.

Development and Assisted Area Status (Devon)

15. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will reconsider the boundaries for development and assisted-area status in Devon.

Mr. Leigh: The Government intend to conduct a full review of the assisted areas—for all of Great Britain—early in the next Parliament.

Mr. Speller: After the general election, will my hon. Friend give priority to consideration of rather more remote areas, like Ilfracombe, Barnstaple or South Molton that have rural or coastal connections? Should not the Government be considering places where rail and air communications are poor and where the reduction in the defence programme is causing employment problems?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is a very effective constituency Member. I know that he lobbies hard on behalf of his constituents. Indeed, he has already brought two delegations to see me. I am aware of his constituency's problems, and I promise that as soon as this review is held we shall urgently consider them. He spoke generally of the problems of rural areas and less-favoured areas. It is interesting that since I have been the Minister responsible for regional policy, regional spending has increased from £506 million in 1990 to £534 million in 1991-92. That shows an elementary fact of political science: that when one becomes a Minister one does the opposite of what one previously promised.

Environmental Technology Innovation Scheme

16. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will increase the level of expenditure on the environmental technology innovation scheme.

Mr. Lilley: Although there has been a good response so far to the environmental technology innovation scheme, there are no plans to increase the current allocation of £12 million.

Mr. Banks: Given the nature of the tasks facing industry, that seems a rather small amount of money. Is any of it used to find alternatives to CFCs in the manufacture of refrigerators, foam, and so on? I assume that the Minister is aware that 750,000 tonnes of CFCs are used in the world every year and that that has resulted in an ozone layer hole as large as Alaska. What are the Government doing to further alternative technologies?

Mr. Lilley: We believe that this scheme will attract considerable sums of private money for the development of such technologies. We believe that small and medium-sized companies, which tend to be the most innovative, will be persuaded to develop new technologies and that that investment will result in considerable leverage. About 280 applications have already been received. I am not sure whether any of them cover the technology that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned, but, like him, I recognise the importance of solving the problem and hope that, by this scheme or otherwise, solutions will be found.

Mr. Brazier: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating staff at the university of Kent and the two commercial pharmaceutical companies with whom the university is combining in a venture called "Viridian", which is a programme of environmental biotechnology based entirely on bacteria that are naturally available? Under that programme, they have been able to demonstrate ways of breaking up many dangerous industrial wastes. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that shows that there is scope, through a range of Government and quasi-government bodies, to encourage action beyond what can be done with direct Government money?

Mr. Lilley: I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating those who are involved in this research. I recently had the privilege of opening the display on biotechnology in George street. This is a subject in which Britain has a lead over the rest of Europe and much of the world. We want to strengthen that lead, as we believe that it is in the interests of British industry, British science and the world environment.

Overseas Investment

17. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of overseas investment in the European Community is made in Britain.

Mr. Leigh: According to the latest information published in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development economic outlook, December 1990, in 1988-89 the United Kingdom had a nearly 40 per cent. share of the total inward foreign direct investment in the EC.

Mr. Arnold: Is not the significance of that reply that in a Community of Twelve, investment in this country is as much as that in the other Eleven put together? Is not that the most telling argument as to the comparative economic strength of this country?

Mr. Leigh: Yes, of course it is. The fact that this country is the No. 1 location for inward investment in Europe shows that the international business community has confidence in our policies. What the House wants to know is whether the international business community has confidence in the policies of the Labour party. We keep asking questions about the Opposition's investment plans: how much they intend to give to the British Technology Group, regional development agencies and investment trusts. There was a Department of Trade and Industry Question Time last month and a debate last week, but the Opposition did not answer those questions. Seven Labour Members are sitting on the Opposition Front Bench. I hope that one of them will stand up now and give the answers, because the whole House wants to know.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Does not the Minister understand that the simple reason for inward investment in Britain has nothing to do with the Government's activities? The Governments of countries such as Germany and France invest in their own industries. The difference is that, far from investing in our own industry, the Government of this country is slaughtering it. Then they have to send Ministers like that youngster around the world with a begging bowl to get other industries to come in to repair the damage that they have done.

Mr. Leigh: Now at last we see the true face of the Labour party on inward investment. The Trades Union Congress has called this alien. I want an answer from one of the hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench about their views on inward investment. We now have companies such as Fujitsu in the north-east of England, Nissan in the north-east of England and Toyota in Derbyshire bringing wealth into this country and improving our manufacturing competitiveness. What is the attitude of the Labour party towards inward investment? Do the Opposition favour it or reject it?

Manufacturing Output

19. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has recently received about manufacturing output.

Mr. Lilley: I have received the recent excellent report by the CBI's manufacturing advisory group which showed that there has been a transformation in manufacturing performance during the 1980s.

Mr. McMaster: With output in the construction industry falling to its lowest level for six years and the industry predicting a further 50,000 job losses this year, when will the Secretary of State stop his policy paralysis and start listening to people in industry who know what they are talking about? Will he now start an emergency investment programme? When will the Secretary of State stop attacking good advice and start attacking the recession?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman surely realises that the key to success in that industry is lower interest rates and that the key to lower interest rates is lower inflation. All the policies that the hon. Gentleman and his party advocate would move us in exactly the opposite direction.

Mr. Batiste: Is my right hon. Friend aware that constituencies such as mine in Leeds have been very considerable beneficiaries of investment in a wide range of different industries? For example, this year alone we shall see the commissioning of chemical and textile plants. We are beneficiaries to the extent of a 20 per cent. reduction in unemployment since the time of the last general election. What those industries fear more than anything else is interference by the Government and the European Commission, interference in the choice of products that they can make, interference in the work patterns that they can enjoy and interference in their wage rates. The more successful my right hon. Friend is in resisting that interference, the greater will be the level of investment in this country.

Mr. Lilley: Everything that my hon. Friend says is echoed by the business men I meet. They know that the greatest damage would be done to this economy by raising taxes, by imposing a minimum wage and by restoring artificial trade union powers. They do not want it. They reject it. They are determined that we continue with the strategy which, as the Confederation of British Industry says, has restored the health of manufacturing industry and revived the strength of the British economy during the 1980s.

Industrial Policy

20. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce to discuss industrial policy.

Mr. Lilley: I next plan to meet representatives of the northern region CBI later this month to discuss a range of business matters.

Mr. Redmond: Does the Secretary of State— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are progressing speedily but the Minister has answered Question 21. We are on Question 20.

Mr. Lilley: I meet representatives of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce from time to time to discuss a range of policies.

Mr. Redmond: Does the Secretary of State accept that people living in the real world question the Government's industrial policy? In fact, the Government have had no industrial policy since being elected in 1979. The people are sick and tired of seeing on the television, hearing on the radio and seeing in the press the fairy stories that the Secretary of State keeps preaching from the Dispatch Box. Does the Secretary of State accept that we should have an industrial policy that is beneficial to Britain so that we can meet the challenge of the 21st century?

Mr. Lilley: I read earlier the CBI's rejection of any policy in which the Government tried to pick winners, determine strategic investments and interfere in the decisions of business. That is the sort of industrial policy that industry does not want. Industry wants low inflation, a consequent reduction in interest rates, competition, open markets, a successful GATT round and completion of the European single market at the end of this year. We will provide that.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that Question Time is an opportunity for Back Benchers and others to ask questions of Ministers and for Ministers to give substantive answers. Today we have not had answers from the Ministers. All we have had is party political polemics. Do you, Mr. Speaker, have any power to instruct Ministers to earn their money—they are paid substantial amounts—and answer the questions on the Order Paper?

Mr. Speaker: I have no such power.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Those of us who have been here throughout Question Time and have questions on the Order Paper were satisfied with the answers given by my right hon. and hon. Friends. We recognise that it is impossible for everyone to be called, including myself, although I had hoped that my question would be reached.

Mr. Speaker: When we have a full hour, I try to reach at least Question 20. We managed to achieve that today.

I think that every hon. Member who wished to sign the book for the ballot has now done so, and I should like to draw it.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you find time to make it clear to Ministers that, if Opposition Front Bench Members were to rise to the taunts that we have heard often today to answer questions, give the Labour party's policy and so on, you would be forced to rule such interventions out of order? They are not here to answer questions. The Government are here to defend their policy, however inadequate they are at doing so.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Let me deal with one at a time. The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) and I have been in the House about the same length of time. Over the numerous elections in which he and I have taken part, I have noticed a tendency for this sort of thing to happen.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not in order for Opposition Front Bench Members to put their policies into the form of questions? If they had any faith in their policies, they would do so.

Mr. Speaker: I have already told the House that I am not responsible for the content of answers, as long as they are in order. I should now like to draw the ballot.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Happy birthday—all right.

Mr. Skinner: There have been occasions when there has been a waste of time during Question Time and you have allowed a little extra time. On this occasion, you were obviously not aware of what happened, but the baby-faced Minister—the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the one with the Pampers on—could not count beyond 20 and we lost two valuable minutes. I think that you should add those on.

Mr. Speaker: The trouble was that he did count beyond 20.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Having heard the Opposition constantly denigrating British industry, we were trying to get in to point out that we should help industry by encouraging the brightest and best, not by crying stinking fish as the Opposition do.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you could advise how the procedure might be reconsidered under which questions must be tabled two weeks in advance. We have seen the disadvantage of that today in that it is not possible directly to raise the 3,000 job losses at Gateway, the 2,000 redundancies at Rover and the 2,000 redundancies at British Aerospace. Events are moving so fast that 2,000 businesses have gone bust since these questions were tabled.

Mr. Speaker: This is a clear extension of Question Time. May I say to the hon. Gentleman that there are opportunities to put such questions to the Leader of the House during business questions on Thursday.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. John Browne
Mr. Ken Hargreaves
Mr. Henry Bellingham

Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms

3.36 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to secure to every person within the United Kingdom the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the European Convention of Human Rights and its protocols; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and certain other rights and freedoms; to ensure that there are effective remedies before the courts and tribunals of the United Kingdom for breaches of these fundamental rights and freedoms; to give such fundamental rights and freedoms the same precedence and priority within the legal systems of the United Kingdom as are given to enforceable Community rights under section 2(1) and (4) of the European Communities Act 1972; to establish a United Kingdom Human Rights Commission with power to initiate legal proceedings for the protection of these fundamental rights and freedoms and to give advice and assistance concerning the protection of these rights; to enable the Human Rights Commission to challenge the validity of any provision of any Act of Parliament that in its opinion is in contravention of the guarantees of the fundamental rights and freedoms secured by this Act by instituting legal proceedings in the High Court, the Court of Session or the High Court of Northern Ireland as the case requires; to enable the Human Rights Commission to examine legislation or proposed legislation for the purpose of ascertaining whether it is inconsistent with the provisions of this Act and to report any such inconsistency to Parliament; and for connected purposes.

The Bill would secure for every person within the United Kingdom the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the European convention on human rights and its protocols and by the international covenant on civil and political rights, and would establish a United Kingdom human rights commission with powers to initiate legal proceedings for the protection of these rights and for connected purposes.

It is about 40 years since a Labour Government under the prime ministership of Clement Attlee acceded to the European convention. The convention had been drafted largely by an English lawyer—Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe —who was subsequently to become Lord Chancellor in a Conservative Government. In 1966, the Government of Mr. Harold Wilson—as he then was—provided that a right of individual petition to the European Commission and Court of Human Rights should be granted. Since then, the United Kingdom Government have had to defend many cases in Strasbourg before the Commission and that Court.

There have been a number of attempts in Parliament —three times in another place and twice in recent years in this place—to secure the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into the domestic law of our country, to ensure that citizens whose fundamental rights and freedoms have been abridged or attacked by an abuse of public power or by the tyranny of the majority should be permitted to have access to our own domestic courts for a remedy. The guarantee of these rights without the provision of such a remedy is basically meaningless.

We stand alone in Europe—the only country among the members of the Council of Europe which does not offer such a fundamental protection in the form of a basic law which may be used to strike down the action or abuse of power by Ministers, public authorities or even Parliament itself.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) Or the European Community itself.

Mr. Maclennan: In the free democratic Commonwealth, there is no country that does not give the rights that the Bill seeks to promote. The last country which stood with us in not having a Bill of Rights was New Zealand; in 1990, New Zealand enacted a Bill of Rights.

This country and this Parliament have legislated for others to secure that right. We did so for the people of Canada and, most recently, last summer, we did so for the people of Hong Kong. But we have not sought to protect our own citizens by means of a measure which is necessary and which we have recognised as necessary in other civilised parliamentary democracies.

The case for such legislation is now strong. I make no partisan points about the abuses of power that have disfigured the present Government, for there have been abuses by both parties of Government. In the past two years, there have been five serious breaches of the rights of the citizen, and judgment has been found against this country by the court in Strasbourg. A further six cases have been deemed admissible before the court by the European Commission of Human Rights.

These are not light matters; they are not academic matters. They touch on the very fundamentals of our freedoms. They affect the right of association, and the freedom of trade unionists not to be part of a closed shop. They touch on freedom of education—the right not to be dragooned against one's will into sending one's children to a school not of one's choice. They govern freedom of expression, and the entitlement of newspapers and the other media to publicise abuses, as *The Sunday Times* did with the thalidomide case.

Those are the important rights which protect—or should protect—our citizens in this democracy. But before people obtain a remedy they have to take the long and expensive course to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg—a typical case takes up to six years. That cannot be right. The time has come to ensure that the procedures for securing those rights are simpler.

The Bill asks British judges in the nations of this country to adjudicate to protect citizens from abuse. That judges are capable of so doing has been demonstrated already, by their readiness, when they sit as the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, to give effect to Bills of Rights enacted by other countries in the Commonwealth. Judges also have increasing experience of giving effect to the broad principles of those rights when enacted by the European Community's legislative process.

It is ironic that the European Court of Justice is recognising the binding effect of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in its procedures, and so, indirectly, our judges are called upon to give effect to those rights in commercial cases. But perhaps the most important cases decided by the European Court of Human Rights are not commercial cases but those that touch upon the family and the individual.

The time has come to move. British public opinion is clear, because, in an opinion poll published by MORI in *The Independent* in October, 79 per cent. of the British people favoured such a step.

The Bill is unlikely to reach the statute book in the latter part of this Parliament, but it can signal to the public the readiness of Parliament to make good a deficiency that has stood for too long.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Robert Maclennan, Mr. James Wallace, Mr. Malcolm Bruce, Mr. Richard Livsey, Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Menzies Campbell and Sir David Steel.

PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Mr. Robert Maclennan accordingly presented a Bill to secure to every person within the United Kingdom the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the European Convention of Human Rights and its protocols, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and certain other rights and freedoms; to ensure that there are effective remedies before the courts and tribunals of the United Kingdom for breaches of these fundamental rights and freedoms; to give such fundamental rights and freedoms the same precedence and priority within the legal systems of the United Kingdom as are given to enforceable Community rights under section 2(1) and (4) of the European Communities Act 1972; to establish a United Kingdom Human Rights Commission with power to initiate legal proceedings for the protection of these fundamental rights and freedoms and to give advice and assistance concerning the protection of these rights; to enable the Human Rights Commission to challenge the validity of any provision of any Act of Parliament that in its opinion is in contravention of the guarantees of the fundamental rights and freedoms secured by this act by instituting legal proceedings in the High Court, the Court of Session or the High Court of Northern Ireland as the case requires; to enable the Human Rights Commission to examine legislation or proposed legislation for the purpose of ascertaining whether it is inconsistent with the provisions of this Act and to report any such inconsistency to Parliament; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February and to be printed. [Bill 76.]

Points of Order

3.45 pm

Mr. Speaker: Before I ask the Clerk to read the Orders of the Day, I have a point of order from Sir Richard Body.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Before we proceed with the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill, your attention will have no doubt been drawn to the fact that, if passed, the Bill will enable a sum of no less than £450 million to be given to the Commission of the European Community. That money is necessary because the Community has illegally spent that sum of money. It therefore follows that we are seeking to condone something that is illegal.

Am I not right in saying that, under Standing Order No. 54, we are debarred from debating that fact for one reason only—that the Bill has been made the first Order of the Day? If it had appeared as the second Order of the Day, we would be able to debate it fully until 10 o'clock.

Although I hope that I would be the last to question the bona fides of those who manage the business of the House —I am not suggesting for one moment that they are using the procedures of the House to prevent a debate on the Bill —is there nothing that could be done now to make the Bill appear as the second Order of the Day? In that way, we could debate it.

Failing that, are there any steps that could be taken by you, Sir, to enable us to voice our objections to the Bill and to enable the public to be more widely informed about their money, the £450 million, which is being handed over for something that has been illegally spent?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If hon. Members will allow, I shall deal with that point of order, because it might save time.

The hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) is correct: under Standing Order No. 54(1), I am bound to put the Question forthwith on both the Second and Third Readings. The hon. Gentleman may regret what the Government have done in this matter, but it is a matter for them, not for me. However, when I put the Question, the hon. Gentleman, if he so wishes, could vote against it.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Does it not say in Standing Order No. 54 that, if the Government choose, they can move the Adjournment of the House to enable a discussion to take place? There are several reasons why undoubtedly that should be done.

First, we are dealing with the illegal spending of £450 million, which is effectively equivalent to about £8 per head of the population of the United Kingdom. It is a great deal of money. Secondly, we know that the EEC is illegally withholding a great deal of cash due to the British Treasury. Thirdly, we know from the news today that the EEC plans to double the contribution of £2·5 billion which we have to make this year—that means that the contribution of £4 per family per week to the EEC will increase to £8.

If we cannot discuss such things, surely it means that Parliament is basically becoming useless. We cannot discuss the expenditure of money on an unlawful purpose —it was stated to be unlawful by the Treasury in its paper that we discussed late the other night. If the Government wanted to discuss the matter, could they not simply use Standing Order No. 54 to move the Adjournment? We

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

could then debate one of the most serious issues—the legality of the EC and how money is taken from British taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker: Whether the Adjournment motion is moved is a question for the Government, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. I have no authority to compel them to do that.

Sir Teddy Taylor: But they could do so.

Mr. Speaker: Well, they could.

As for the second part of the hon. Gentleman's point of order, the Bill reflects exactly what the House agreed to last week, and that is all that it could do. If further payments of the same kind were required, the Government would have to present a new estimate, and a further Bill would then be necessary.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Cryer first, please.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In a paper presented to the House when the matter was debated, the Treasury made it clear that it admitted that part of that money was illegal and subject to a challenge in the European Court. Under those circumstances, is it proper for Parliament to proceed to vote on that expenditure when part of it is challenged as being of dubious legality? There must be a Standing Order whereby the matter can at least be deferred rather than involve Parliament in a clear illegality, or an attempt to support one.

Mr. Speaker: I recollect selecting an amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) on that very matter last week. The House divided on it, and the decision of the House was taken.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During Trade and Industry questions, you told the House that it must proceed by debate rather than by visual aids after I had shown a banned advertisement by the British Medical Association. May I seek clarification on that? There has been a long and honourable tradition of using visual aids in the House. An hon. Member once brought in a battery hen cage to illustrate the cruelty of battery cages and there have been many other examples. Although I realise that they could be abused because of television cameras in the House, can we not have the same right to use visual aids that was permitted before cameras came to the House?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We shall have a dead fox here on Friday.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) casts his mind back to our debates on whether the House should be televised, he will remember that concern was expressed on both sides about the display of visual aids. Although the hon. Gentleman is technically correct to say that it is not out of order to display such items, I believe that it would be deprecated by the whole House if visual aids were generally used. After all, from what the hon. Gentleman wants, it is a small move to Members displaying advertisements for Coca-Cola, for example.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Further to the previous point of order, Mr. Speaker. In last week's debate, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) asked whether the consent of the House was required. He said that the Government have their hands in our pockets again and the Minister in charge of the debate replied:

> "I do not have my hands in your pockets, but Europe does."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 1992; Vol. *203*, c. 260.]

So the Government have admitted that Europe is putting its hands illegally into our pockets. Surely we should have time to debate that.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may be right about what was said, but I have no authority to change the procedures. I am bound by them.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There have been occasions when similar situations have occurred and it has been pretty clear that hon. Members on both sides of the House have tried to press on you the need to get the business changed, and you have taken that into account.

You will have noticed, Mr. Speaker, that the Leader of the House has not even turned up. We are discussing £450 million of illegal expenditure by the tinpot Common Market. You were not elected by the Common Market; you represent Parliament. What is happening in, or should I say over, your name today is that the Government are allowing £450 million to go through on the nod. You know only too well what will happen: when the Division bells ring after we have shouted no to the expenditure, the shop stewards—the Whips—of the Tory party will be on the Doors to shovel Tory Members through to gain a victory. It is a scandal, and you should suspend the Sitting in order that some discussion can take place.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman well knows that I am bound by the Standing Orders of the House, whatever my own feelings on any matter may be.

Several Hon. Members: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not need any more help on that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it on museums?

Mr. Banks: No, it is on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill. It is sometimes useful to know what one is voting for or against. Will you, Mr. Speaker, advise me on this matter? Clause 2 states:

> "The Treasury may issue out of the Consolidated Fund of the United Kingdom and apply towards making good the supply granted to Her Majesty for the service of the year ending on 31st March 1993 the sum of £1,000."

One cannot get much for £1,000 these days—not even if one happens to be the Queen. If additional sums beyond the £1,000 to go to Her Majesty are requested, will the permission of the House be sought?

Mr. Speaker: I understand that that is a token amount, which was fully debated last week.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak not because I have had my name mentioned but to say that, whenever we as Back Benchers have the opportunity to complain about what goes on in this place, we have to come to you. You are the protector of the Back Bencher. We have complained time and time again about European affairs being dealt with in the early hours of the morning. We have an opportunity to discuss that problem at this earlier time of day and the Government are denying Back Benchers the right to express their view on it. Come on, Mr. Speaker, get off your backside and do something about it!

Mr. Speaker: I think what we should be doing today is discussing the Standing Orders—I am bound by them and cannot go beyond them.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you confirm that the debate on 4 February was limited to an hour and a half, took place late at night and many Members who wished to speak were debarred from doing so? From the remarks that you have already made, it seems that it would be possible for the Government representatives to stay seated and say, "Not moved," so that the matter can come back and be placed second on the Order Paper on another day, and be debated. Is that the position?

Mr. Speaker: That could happen.

Orders of the Day

CONSOLIDATED FUND [No. 2] BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills):—*

The House divided: Ayes 186, Noes 50.

Division No. 79] **[3.57 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Robert
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Butler, Chris
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartwright, John
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony

Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Nicol
Stevens, Lewis

Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. David Davis.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bermingham, Gerald
Bottomley, Peter
Budgen, Nicholas
Caborn, Richard
Carttiss, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cummings, John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dicks, Terry
Edwards, Huw
Farr, Sir John
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Graham, Thomas
Hinchliffe, David
Kilfedder, James

Kilfoyle, Peter
Leighton, Ron
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Mudd, David
Nellist, Dave
Paisley, Rev Ian
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Redmond, Martin
Rowlands, Ted
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Richard Body and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Severn Bridges Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 2

ACQUISITION AND OCCUPATION OF LAND

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 2, line 6, at end insert—

("(1A) Nothing in this section authorises the Secretary of State to acquire compulsorily any of the land in the City of Bristol shown numbered 25, 41 or 42 on the deposited plans.")

4.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

It may be for the convenience of the House if I also address the amendments Nos. 2 to 6. They are all protective provisions for the benefit of statutory undertakers or other third parties of the sort typically found in hybrid and private legislation. They were made by the Select Committee in another place, at the Government's request. The Government had agreed to promote the amendments on the strength of the agreement of the third parties concerned to withdraw their various petitions against the Bill.

I emphasise that none of the amendments does anything other than impose minor conditions and restrictions on the proposed powers of the Secretary of State, which were already provided for in the Bill as it left this House. The Government are happy to accept these amendments for the proper protection of all parties concerned, and are confident that they will not adversely affect implementation of the Bill's proposals. Accordingly, I commend them to the House.

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I am delighted to say that the Opposition also agree with the Lords amendments. They affect the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) who is at present chairing the Welsh Grand Committee.

The amendments affect the community action group whose petition, signed by some 518 people, was presented to their Lordships. They also received another petition from Mr. and Mrs. North from that community. Another 15 petitions were withdrawn. They were naturally concerned about the environmental issues affecting the route on the Welsh side of the estuary, such as the visual impact, the noise from the toll plaza and the atmospheric pollution. Their Lordships accepted some of those points and the Department of Transport talked of compensation and an additional screen and I hope that those commitments will be met. As much assurance as possible should be given to local residents and we agree with the amendments, which should go some way to achieving that.

We have some general reservations about the level of tolls on the bridge and the level of accountability, but we agree that there is a considerable need in Wales for a second crossing to assist our beleaguered economy.

Question put and agreed to.

Subsequent Lords amendments agreed to.

Museums and Galleries Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.11 pm

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This has been a great year for the national museums and galleries funded by my office, an annus mirabilis which comes after a period of substantial change in which trustees, new directors, curators, warders and staff have accepted the challenge to present their collections to the public in a way that invites scholars and pedagogues to continue their studies within their walls and, most important, excites the public and encourages, tempts and invites the pensioner, parent and child to spend a Saturday afternoon there rather than go to the cinema or football match. I commend the trustees, directors and museum staff for rising to the new age.

Museums and galleries are in a challenging business. They compete with libraries, theme parks, historic homes and even sports grounds as places where education, scholarship and entertainment must mix, where new visions are displayed and new horizons opened up.

That message was true in late Victorian times when galleries were being built by public subscription and private patronage to show pictures to the public for the first time, and when the great range of museums was built in South Kensington, Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool and Edinburgh, to name but a few. An afternoon out then was often an afternoon at the museum or art gallery.

That message was somewhat lost in the 1960s and 1970s. It is now again a vital part of the approach of the professional director and his or her increasingly well-trained team. It is an approach that has been enormously encouraged by the many initiatives taken by my well-respected predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce), and myself.

To name but a few of those initiatives there is the funding of the Museums Training Institute which was established by my right hon. Friend in order to develop agreed occupational standards and qualifications for the museum sector. We give grant in aid to the Museums and Galleries Commission, which, among other things, administers the museum registration scheme which sets basic common standards for all sizes and types of museums. It also provides money for the area museum councils, which in turn give advice to non-national local museums on improving their collections and services to the public. I take the opportunity provided by this rare debate on museums and galleries to thank all those working in those different institutes, commissions and councils.

The Bill is especially concerned with four leading institutions funded directly by my office—the national gallery, Tate gallery, national portrait gallery, and Wallace collection.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Before the Minister describes his Bill, I refer to his grandiloquent statement that this has been an annus mirabilis for museums. What has been so special about this year, and what has the Minister done in respect of the obvious difficulty confronted by museums in finding sufficient funds to enter the market to buy new works of art, and to meet Lord Palumbo's target for the fabric of museums? The steps taken seem rather tiny, and the Minister's claim may be thought inflated.

Mr. Renton: As the hon. Gentleman represents a Scottish constituency, he will know—although this is not one of my responsibilities—that during this year, the national museum of Scotland in Edinburgh will award the design for the extension to its great building. I understand that it is already making a public appeal and seeking funds from the Scottish Office. That is a good example in the hon. Gentleman's home country. As to the rest, the hon. Gentleman anticipates my speech. I will talk about some specific successes in national museums and galleries in the part of my speech that I am about to reach.

The first of the four of my client institutions is the national gallery. Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House know that Her Majesty the Queen graciously opened its new Sainsbury wing in 1991. Anyone who was present on that occasion, or who has visited the wing since, will agree that it establishes a superb background against which the gallery's quattrocento and cinquecento paintings can be hung.

The wing was made possible entirely by the generous gifts of the three brothers John, Simon, and Tim Sainsbury —the latter otherwise known to us as the right hon. Member for Hove. Rightly and properly, they have been described as modern Medicis for their generosity in making that wing available. I have no doubt that the Medicis would warmly approve the background against which the beautiful pietà Serena and other early renaissance pictures are now hung.

There have also been several gallery refurbishments, helped by individual sponsorship—notably that of Mr. Wohl; Agnew; the former American ambassador, Mr. Annenberg; and Hazlitt, Gooden and Fox—whose refurbished galleries I was pleased to visit just the other day.

I have been able to allocate an extra £500,000 for roof and services work, in addition to the substantial other sums made available by my office to the national gallery. You, Mr. Speaker, would not want me to leave the subject of that gallery without referring to the outstanding exhibition of more than 70 paintings from Heinz Berggruen's internationally famous private collection. I congratulate the gallery's retired chairman, Lord Rothschild, and its director, Neil MacGregor, on their skill in persuading Heinz Berggruen to lend those great pictures for at least five years.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): While we are all deeply grateful to these fat cats for all the money that they have put into the arts, can the Minister tell us whether they enjoy any tax breaks for being so munificent with the money that they have garnered in the check-outs of the supermarkets that they run?

Mr. David Enwright (Hemsworth): On Sundays.

Mr. Banks: Yes, on Sundays.

Mr. Renton: I am sure that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who follows these matters closely and who probably does some of his shopping at these supermarkets, even on Sunday——

Mr. Banks: No.

Mr. Renton: ——will know that these generous donations were made from the extensive number of charitable trusts formed by members of the Sainsbury family in recent years, which have helped many an institution, not just the national gallery.

Next on my list is the Tate gallery. Apart from many improvements at Millbank itself, in the past two years the Tate has spread its wings into more distant parts of the country. In 1988 the Tate gallery Liverpool was opened, thus helping the process of regeneration around the Albert dock in Liverpool. This follows the Government's policy of increasing public access to the nation's collections. I congratulate the trustees of the Tate on the vigorous programme of displays at Liverpool which has made the Tate's 20th century art available to a new regional audience.

This year the Tate gallery in St. Ives is being built. I have given the Tate an extra £100,000 to help begin operations there. Extra Government money——

Mr. Tony Banks: On whose behalf?

Mr. Renton: On behalf of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West. I had him particularly in mind, knowing his interest in the St. Ives school of painting. Extra Government money has been allocated for refurbishment work at Millbank.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): While the Minister takes credit for his Government's involvement in the excellent Tate in Liverpool, will he explain to the House and to those who admire this gallery why, when the Tate applied to him last November for an additional £600,000 to continue its work at the Tate in the north, he provided only £300,000?

Mr. Renton: Even the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), with his known ability to scatter taxpayers' money here, there and everywhere regardless of consequences in cost, will have been told by his sources that I gave the Tate half the requested sum, £300,000, and urged it to use its own best housekeeping endeavours to ensure that sufficient of the remainder could be found in order to make certain that the Tate in Liverpool remains fully open. I understand that this is the course of action that the director and trustees are likely to follow. So prudence allied with generosity is likely to have an appropriate reward.

At Millbank we have seen excellent special exhibitions in the past few months: Constable sponsored by Barclays bank; an exhibition of Sir Anthony Caro's sculptures, sponsored by KPMG; and next week the third version of "New Displays", sponsored by British Petroleum, which enables the Tate to rotate works from its collection for display. I am delighted that the extensive gallery, which has been refurbished thanks to the generosity of Nomura, is now complete and is likely to open shortly.

As to the national portrait gallery, with Government support and encouragement it has embarked on a gallery development plan that will increase exhibition space by 37 per cent. We provided additional buildings on Orange street behind the gallery, together with £3·5 million towards the plan. The gallery has a successful appeal under way and has held some notable exhibitions such as "The Portrait in British Art", sponsored by Enterprise Oil.

I mention these sponsors to show the House the wide variety of British businesses which are now prepared to work hand in hand with the Government, with the funds made available by the Office of Arts and Libraries, because they see that sponsorship of the arts falls increasingly within the practice and objects of their companies and helps to promote their corporate image, as well as being extremely helpful to the art institute involved. That is why we have seen over the past 15 years business sponsorship of the arts grow from barely £500,000 in the mid-1970s to well over £40 million now.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I have been a member of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts almost since the outset. We produced a major report on public and private funding of the arts, and it was obvious to every member of the Committee and everyone who read the report just how important public money was. Without public money, the arts could hardly exist.

While preparing our report on charges for entrance to galleries and museums, we visited the Louvre. That was the only subject, in the history of the Select Committee, on which the Opposition chose to produce a minority report. Lord Rothschild, of the national gallery, and Neil MacGregor were both opposed to the Government's view; neither wanted charges. The Victoria and Albert museum told us that the money that it received from the Government was not even sufficient to deal with the fabric of the museum, and that it was deeply worried.

Will the Minister please stop being so lyrical? Much as we want sponsorship, it is quite insufficient to deal with the problems, as is the money from the Government.

Mr. Renton: Of course public funding plays a part. That is why I was delighted to inform the House, only a few weeks ago, that, for the third year running my Department had been able to give the Arts Council a record increase. That shows the Government's commitment to supporting the arts. In the year ahead, the Arts Council will receive a 14 per cent. increase—an extra £27 million.

I shall deal with the question of charging later in my speech, and if the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) wants to ask any further questions after that he is welcome to do so. I was interested to learn that the Select Committee had visited the Louvre. The Louvre charges for entrance and, having used the money to fund an expensive capital expansion programme, it is now in the process of tripling the number of admissions. It is not the charge that puts people off visiting a gallery or museum; they are put off if a collection is not interestingly displayed. The Louvre's is a perfect example of a charging policy that works.

Mr. Flannery *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman returns to this point when I have made my own specific comments. He has said that he has to go to a meeting.

Mr. Flannery: We visited the Louvre precisely because it charged for entrance. It has charged ever since the introduction of the Napoleonic code, and it is therefore impossible to compare France with other countries in which charges have never been imposed.

Sir Robert Peel said that the purpose of the national gallery was to allow people who could not afford to put pictures on their walls to look at them free of charge—and he was a noble Tory, to say the least. When, for instance, the national museum of Wales introduced charges, admissions fell by 80 per cent. When charges are introduced, the people who have no art in their houses are the ones who stop visiting galleries. That is what the Government have done.

Mr. Renton: I now regret giving way to the hon. Gentleman again. He has simply repeated his earlier points. The Prado in Madrid charges; so does the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Very few national museums do not.

Mr. Flannery *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I have given the hon. Gentleman two bites at the cherry. He should now listen to the answer. By charging, and by turning from direct vote to grant in aid, we have enabled museums and galleries to decide to charge if they wish. It is their decision, not ours. We do not insist that, for instance, the Victoria and Albert museum charge for entrance. That is up to the trustees, who may decide that charging would provide additional revenue with which they could mount special collections and special exhibitions from all over the world. That decision was taken by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham and, as I shall demonstrate in a few moments, it has been very well justified by the results.

It is with the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman that I say that he should take his head out of the sand and look around the world to see what is happening in all the leading museums and galleries.

The Wallace collection is, of course, unique. As hon. Members will know, it is a remarkable collection of 18th-century paintings and furniture, put together at a time when, perhaps, British collecting was at its height, and given to the nation through the generosity of the Hertford family. The largest room there must be one of the finest galleries in the world. I am delighted that the collection is in such good shape. Recent repairs to the roof were carried out with Government support.

Having spoken of the four particular museums and galleries that are covered by the Bill, I think with very great pleasure of the many visits that I have made over the past year to other museums and galleries—national, local and independent—throughout the country. In almost all cases I was much impressed by the vigour and the enterprising spirit with which the collections are being shown off. In this manner the museums and galleries are seeking to attract a larger proportion of people who are looking for things to do outside their homes.

The Liberal spokesman—the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan)—asked about the refurbishment of national museum and gallery buildings. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that refurbishment is proceeding very well. Nearly £200 million of Government money will be spent on it over the next three years. It is not simply a matter of throwing money at the work to be done; we assess very carefully the forward building programmes. I should like to make special mention of the excellent progress that is being made with the refurbishment of Sir John Soane's museum, which I sponsor. This funding is provided jointly with MEPC plc. There is also the full refurbishment of the south-west wing of the national maritime museum, which is entirely Government funded.

Help is being given very widely through the museums and galleries improvement fund, which we fund jointly with very generous trusts from the Wolfson family. The amount has recently been increased to £20 million, in all, over the next five years, and it is now supporting more than 100 projects in museums up and down the country—in local museums such as the Herbert art gallery in Coventry, the Laing art gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne, the Tolson museum in Huddersfield, the Manchester city art gallery, the Colchester castle museum, and the museum of Dartmoor life in Okehampton.

In some measure the Bill consolidates the successes that I have mentioned. In a sense it is an accolade to the trustees, the directors and the staffs of the four galleries that are particularly concerned. The Bill is intended primarily to provide wide and explicit powers for the trustees of the national gallery, the Tate, the national portrait gallery and the Wallace collection in order that they may be able to discharge their heavy responsibilities in the modern world. Most decisions are now, rightly, being taken by the trustees and their staffs, especially in relation to building programmes since these were untied from the Property Services Agency in 1988.

Many large projects and contracts are involved, and it is therefore important that corporate status be provided as it is simply not right that trustees should be individually liable in respect of contracts. A consequence of incorporation is that it is necessary to spell out the new boards' powers and responsibilities explicitly, rather than, as hitherto, expect the boards to rely, for the most part, on the common law of trusteeship. I wish to ensure that, in doing this, we provide a framework in which the new boards of trustees will have the freedom and flexibility to run the galleries in the most beneficial way possible.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House will see that clause 2 maintains certain powers with regard to charging. In particular, it is in line with the Government's policy that trustees themselves should be able to decide whether to make a charge for admission. It sustains their present common law right to make such a charge. As we have just seen, the charging policy of museums and galleries excites much stronger feelings in the House, rather curiously, than it does among the institutions. Evidently the Opposition still take the high-minded attitude that this wicked policy has been imposed on museums and galleries by the Government. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central said that Labour would abolish charges on core collections.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Renton: No, not at the moment. I want to complete this section of my speech.

I say again that the Government do not impose the charges. It is up to each individual institution to decide whether to impose charges, whether for entry to specific exhibitions or generally, and whether to provide concessions for students, pensioners, the disabled and the unemployed. Even those museums and galleries that make a charge have generous arrangements for different categories of people. They provide free admission for pre-booked school parties and concessionary rates for other groups of visitors.

The institutions that charge have gained greatly from the proceeds raised. They do not go into the Government's coffers; they are used, together with the proceeds from the shop, cafe and sponsorship, for activities that the museums and galleries themselves choose. This additional revenue,

[Mr. Renton]

which amounted last year to £46 million in total, of which £7·3 million related to admission charges, has given each museum and gallery that has decided to charge greater freedom and independence to run its own affairs and to expand in the way that it particularly wants.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Fisher *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I have to say to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central and also to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, both of whom I see are trying to intervene, that for the Labour party to say publicly in its policy documents that it intends to take away that freedom is like turning the clock back to the days before perestroika was discovered. It is the attitude of backward cavemen who want to take the world back into the dark days because of their own myopia.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister referred to the benefits that he claims the museums gain, though he knows perfectly well that every single museum that imposes charges would prefer not to do so because it dislikes the reduced attendances that have resulted from the imposition of entrance charges. The Minister says that the museums and galleries have benefited. Why does not he ask the public, who elected both the right hon. Gentleman and his Government as well as all Opposition Members, how they have benefited from the very substantial fall in attendance? The national museum of Wales, we were told, saw a drop of 80 per cent. in attendance when it imposed charges. How does the Minister believe that the public in Wales benefited from charging for entrance to that museum?

Mr. Renton: After years as shadow Minister for the Arts, the hon. Gentleman shows an ignorance about the subject which appals me. No wonder there is talk that Melvyn Bragg is to become Lord Bragg and Minister for the Arts, if ever there were to be a Labour Government. I am astonished by the hon. Gentleman. Where has he been? Does he not know that, as a result of charging to enter the "Visions of Japan" exhibition, admissions to the V and A went up substantially? As the museum director said, putting on a special exhibition for which the museum imposed a charge attracted many more people into the V and A. If the hon. Gentleman does not know that, I fear that he is never going to get any further than his present job as shadow Minister for the Arts.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I shall give way once more to the hon. Gentleman. Then I must get on with the rest of my speech.

Mr. Banks: I put it to the Minister that he is being very combative and getting us all worked up, but the fact is that he has not answered the question that was put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). An accusation of high-mindedness is one which I am quite prepared to bear because it was high-mindedness, in many ways, that set up the museums. They were established by people who were considerably more high-minded than the present Government. There is no argument on the Opposition side about charges being imposed for special exhibitions. That is perfectly acceptable. The Minister should not use that as a way of trying to rebut the argument. However, when it comes to charging an entrance fee for general admission, no single museum, if given the choice, would impose a charge. Every museum knows, though, that it needs that money because the Government are not giving it the necessary funding.

Mr. Renton: I despair of Opposition Members who think that they know something about the subject, but in fact know nothing. The Tate and the national gallery have put on specific exhibitions for which they have charged —the Queen's pictures in the national gallery and the Constable collection in the Tate. They said that that brought additional people into the galleries. If the Labour party is stuck with the policy of the 1970s, I realise how much the arts will suffer if it is ever in a position to execute its policies. I am deeply destressed, as is most of the House, at the ignorance shown by Opposition Members.

In respect of disposals from collections, I have sought to honour the commitment given to the House in 1989 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham that any relevant powers would, as far as possible, be tailor-made to meet the specific requirements of each institution for the optimum management of its collection. *[Interruption.]* I imagine that that wish might be shared even by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), who is speaking from a sedentary position. There is now a much greater willingness to explore other sources of funding to the benefit of the taxpayer. There is a greater emphasis on trading revenue, which was stimulated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham's revision of the financing arrangements for national museums and galleries in 1986 in which Government funding was changed from direct vote to grant in aid so that national museums and galleries would be able to retain their self-generated receipts without offsetting reductions in Government grant. Opposition Members should bear that in mind.

The overall purpose was to provide an opportunity for a larger growth in the total funding available to them than would otherwise be possible. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham undertook to put grant in aid on a regular legislative basis and that is what the Bill does. Hitherto, it has rested on the annual Appropriation Act. Before my right hon. Friend's far-sighted revision of the arrangements, the national museums and galleries trading receipts had to be surrendered and revoted to them. That was hardly an incentive mechanism and it has been set right in perpetuity by the Bill.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The right hon. Gentleman will remember that I used to plague him with Adjournment debates on the natural history museum. I know that the powers of disposal for that museum are separate from what we are discussing today. However, since the subject has arisen again in what we read and from what we hear from those involved about the dire position of the South Kensington museum, is there anything that the Minister can say about those who work there and what the future holds for them?

Mr. Renton: I know of the hon. Gentleman's worries about the natural history museum. He has often spoken of them in the House to my predecessor and myself. The reorganisation of that museum is now well in place and it is benefiting from that. Curation has been strengthened and there is a more effective and efficient advisory service. The impressive ecology gallery has been opened and a new dinosaur gallery is planned—*[Interruption.]* It is typical that the Opposition do not want to hear the facts. Attendance in 1991 was 1·5 million, which is a 2·8 per cent. increase over 1990. I have not been advised of any likely changes in the museum's disposal plans. If the hon. Gentleman has any specific detail about that, perhaps he will write to me. The matter is not covered by the Bill and I should make progress.

The Bill is broadly similar in structure and provisions to the National Heritage Act 1983 which put the V and A and science museum on a regular footing and the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985. Both those Acts, which had all-party support at the time, have stood the test of time and the Government have therefore chosen to follow a similar path on this occasion.

It has been recognised for some time that the present statutory basis of the four institutions is deficient. Their powers are often ill-defined and overly rigid in scope—it is impossible to open the Tate restaurant when the gallery is closed and there is no power to have a restaurant at the national portrait gallery. That leads to frustrating uncertainties about what may and may not be done by the trustees.

The national portrait gallery rests almost entirely on a Treasury minute of 1856. Although the Treasury minute is an excellent document, it may be out of date. The Tate gallery rests, for the most part, on the National Gallery and Tate Gallery Act 1954 which set up the Tate as a separate body and allowed for rationalisation of the collections, but provided little else. The Wallace derives a good part of its legal standing from a Treasury minute of 1897. Those and other instruments served their purpose in the beginnings of the galleries, but, in terms of present day requirements, they no longer provide a way forward.

The Bill falls into four main parts. The first part establishes new incorporated boards of trustees for the national gallery, Tate gallery, national portrait gallery and Wallace collection, deals with their general functions, constitutions and powers, including those to form companies, in three cases—not the Wallace—to acquire and dispose of pictures and other objects and to lend and borrow such objects.

The House will wish to know that, apart from being able to transfer pictures to other collections, I have taken the view that the national gallery should not be able to dispose of any work of art—other than by way of transfer to another specified collection—because the pictures in its collection are of established merit and significance. In addition, all the pictures are presently hung and it is logical to keep them together.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The Minister has said on a number of occasions that the Bill deals primarily with the galleries for which his Department is responsible. It also deals with the national gallery of Scotland? Can he explain why the Bill provides for tight policies for disposal of works of art in respect of English galleries, but does not make the corresponding provisions for the national gallery of Scotland? If I catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope to demonstrate that that will place the national gallery of Scotland at a substantial disadvantage. No Scottish Office Minister has turned up today, but I wonder whether the Minister can deal with that matter, because it is of great concern to the trustees north of the border.

Mr. Renton: I am aware that the matter has been raised by the trustees, but no specific request has come to me.

Mr. Darling *rose*——

Mr. Renton: Is the hon. Gentleman doubting my word?

Mr. Darling: The Minister has been using the pronoun a great deal today. I can assure him that the Scottish Office was made aware of the trustees' concern some months ago. It would appear that the Scottish Office has been grossly negligent if it has not told his Department, which I assume is primarily responsible for the drafting of the Bill, about that concern. Will the Minister check, before the end of the debate, whether his Department has any knowledge of the Scottish Office being contacted? If the Scottish Office did not even get in touch with his Department, the resentment north of the border will be substantial.

Mr. Renton: I recognise once again the hectoring and bullying manner that the hon. Gentleman adopted when we met for debates on immigration. I regret that it continues. I am aware that an approach was made to the Scottish Office. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) will allow me to finish. It did not come to my office as such, because the first view taken by the Scottish Office was that if such powers were given to the national gallery of Scotland they would render the Bill hybrid. That is the position now.

Mr. Fisher: The record will show that before giving way to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) the Minister said that the Bill gave powers to all three museums to dispose of works, apart from the Wallace collection. If he refers to the Bill, he will see that it does not give powers to the national gallery. I am surprised that he is not a master of the Bill that he is presenting. I am sure that he would not wish to mislead the House.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman either does not listen or does not read. I have taken the view that the national gallery should not be able to dispose of any work of art other than by way of transfer to another specified collection. That is what I said. If the hon. Gentleman listened more carefully and was not so keen to score party-political points, he might absorb the contents of the Bill more easily.

In keeping with the understanding entered into at the time of the Wallace collection passing to the nation, I propose that it should not be able to acquire or dispose of works of art and that it should remain a closed collection in the terms of the original bequest, which was to be

> "kept together unmixt with other objects".

The Tate and the national portrait galleries are rather different animals and I propose that they should be given limited powers of disposal. The reasoning for that is reflected in their collections.

The great majority of the Tate's collection—some 75 per cent.—cannot be hung at any one time. Its collections are also subject to much greater change as its function is to acquire the work largely of contemporary artists. If in the context of changing needs it needs to dispose occasionally of examples of works which overlap or are duplicated, it should have the right to do so. It can then use the resources released to add to the collection in any

[Mr. Renton]

manner that it wishes. I stress that the decision to dispose would be a matter for the trustees and the Government would play no part.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I intend to finish my speech. I have been on my feet for a long time and I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will be able to make his point.

Equally, the proceeds of the disposal would be freely used by it but only to acquire further works of art for its collections. I must also stress that this power in no way signals a Government wish to see a widespread disposal of the Tate's collections. It is a reserve power to be used occasionally and after full consideration by the trustees.

The Bill provides powers to the national portrait gallery to transfer objects and to dispose of duplicates but in its case I have added, at the trustees' request, a power to enable them—if they so wish—to dispose of portraits when the board is satisfied that the identification of the person portrayed has been discredited—this is to assist them in the proper management of their collection. Again, any money from disposals could be used by the board only to acquire further objects for the collection.

The second part of the Bill empowers these and other boards of trustees of specified museums, galleries and libraries—all of considerable standing—to transfer objects from their collections to other similarly specified institutions. For the most part, this is sustaining and expanding the transfer provisions of the National and Tate Gallery Act 1954 which the Bill would repeal. It also provides for gifts of works of art to the nation or for the public benefit to be vested in specified institutions and enables Crown land and buildings occupied by specified national museums, galleries and libraries to be transferred to their governing bodies notwithstanding any prohibition or restriction to the contrary. The latter provision is intended, within constraints, to facilitate the trustees to be given ownership of their particular estates, and the policy was announced in another place in 1989.

These transfers will place a further responsibility on the trustees—that of complying with planning law in respect of alterations to their listed buildings—because at the moment there is Crown exemption. I look to them to make the fullest use of these wonderful buildings as modern museums while preserving the buildings' historic character.

The third part provides for the payment of grant in aid to certain national museums. I have already mentioned this point and it is a tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham because he suggested the idea during his long term as Minister for the Arts. It provides for the payment of grant in aid to certain national museums, galleries and libraries and the Museums and Galleries Commission by the appropriate Minister out of money provided by Parliament, for the keeping of proper records and accounts and the examination and certification of those accounts by the Comptroller and Auditor General and for him to report on those accounts to Parliament.

Clause 10, which deals with indemnities at greater length, provides for designated institutions to give indemnities when borrowing objects for public exhibition or study and to provide for the financing of those indemnities.

Under current arrangements, indemnities for works of art loaned to our national museums and galleries are issued by the Office of Arts and Libraries and some other Government Departments, at the request and on the advice of their respective institutions. Senior national museum directors made representations to me last week that they wished the present arrangements to continue. In their representations, they have acknowledged the speed with which indemnities are issued by my office and the prompt advice given on tricky problems, especially indemnity applications from foreign lenders.

Clause 10 was drawn up following an undertaking by my right hon. Friend in response to previous representations to empower national museums and galleries to issue their own indemnities, but in the light of representations made to me at the end of last week, I intend to table an amendment at the Committee stage withdrawing clause 10 and substituting a new clause which will make technical improvements to the National Heritage Act 1980 in the matter of reporting liabilities and the need only to approve borrowers, not lenders.

The fourth part deals with minor and supplemental matters, but I would not wish the House to overlook the provision, at the request of the trustees, to change the name of the British museum (natural history) to the natural history museum by which it has come generally to be known, an important marker in its successful development as a separate body with an international reputation.

The board of trustees of the armouries was set up by the National Heritage Act 1983, but, unlike some bodies, was not then given the power to form companies. The Bill would give the board those powers, which are already enjoyed by similar bodies, and also allow it to make grants for appropriate purposes.

Other provisions of the Bill deal with particular Welsh institutions and certain provisions extend to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In conclusion——

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): My hon. Friend referred five minutes ago to the payment of grants. Will he take note of the fact that many of us on the Back Benches very much hope that the Government will introduce measures to make possible the creation of a national lottery which will throw up substantial funds for the refurbishment, repair and maintenance and construction of museum buildings in the national interest? Will he not only take note of that but convey it to the Government as a whole, in the hope that they will have a Bill ready on the stocks for early implementation in the very first Session of the new Parliament for our Governmnent to introduce?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Renton To judge from that response, I think that my hon. Friend has a great deal of support in the House. If we were to add those provisions to the Bill, I fear that we might not fall within the long title of the Bill. However, I very much support and understand my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for a national lottery.

The time has come to build further on the foundations of the achievements of the trustees and professional staffs, the public's growing interest and the Government's profound commitment to the future of these great institutions. It is important to ensure that the trustees of the four galleries have the powers to underpin that future. The Bill does that and more, and I hope that it will be warmly received.

I found on my desk a little sticker which states "Vote for the Arts", issued by the National Campaign for the Arts. I have no doubt that by voting for the Bill and for the Conservatives' record of achievement the arts will prosper far more than they would under the dogmatic, doctrinaire, interfering and bureaucratic solutions proposed by Labour. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.57 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): I think that the Minister has set a record in the House by making what was probably one of the longest Second Reading speeches for one of the shortest Bills. He entertained the House for 47 minutes. He gave way generously to many hon. Members—and I am sure that they appreciated it —but I suspect that we were hearing the Minister's swan song. I suspect that that was the last time that he will make a speech as Minister for the Arts, and I do not think that the House would begrudge him a longer time to say his farewells. He has not held the post very long but he has worked hard and the arts world has appreciated that.

Mr. Tony Banks: Patronise him, patronise him.

Mr. Fisher: I thank my hon. Friend. However, it was a long swan song for a short Bill. I do not think that many hon. Members would criticise the length of the speech but they and members of the museum and arts worlds outside would criticise the Bill's contents.

We have heard 47 minutes of the most extraordinary self-congratulation and complacency that can have ever been heard. I do not believe that the museum world will recognise the picture of the Government's stewardship that the Minister sought to paint. He knows very well from the deputations of trustees and directors of national galleries and of galleries and museums around the country that they have been hugely critical of the Government's neglect. I do not understand how the Government can paint the picture that they have.

The real context of the Bill is more likely to be portrayed by the fact that last year the Tate gallery—one of the four galleries covered by the Bill—was able to purchase one picture on behalf of the nation. That is all that it could afford under this Government.

The Minister referred to the detail in the Bill, and that specifically charges the Tate gallery to

"care for, preserve and add to"

its collection. Yet the Government's stewardship of the Tate has allowed it to add one picture last year. That is the background of neglect against which we must realise that the Bill is being introduced.

The Opposition undoubtedly welcome most of the Bill. Its provisions have been around for about three years, since the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) introduced measures and ideas along those lines. Almost all those provisions command bipartisan support. We welcome the fact that the Government have introduced the Bill, and we shall not oppose it.

However, as the Minister said, the Bill raises important questions about the structure and accountability of the four galleries concerned, about their finances and obligations, about their ability to trade and to acquire and dispose of works of art, and about their liabilities and indemnities in the event of any damage. The way in which the Government have handled those matters tells us much about their attitude to museums.

The Government probably have the worst record on looking after museums of any Government since the war. It could be said that they have abandoned whole areas of their responsibility to the national museums. The fact that the Minister started his speech by talking about an annus mirabilis will have been met with incredulity outside the House. Members of the public reading his speech will claw through its 47 minutes looking for anything that has happened in the past year for which the Government can claim credit.

The Minister rightly said that good things have happened—such as the extremely good directorship of all four collections, most notably of the national gallery under Mr. Neil MacGregor, and of the Tate gallery under Mr. Nicholas Serota. But all that good work has happened in spite of the Government—mainly because of the way in which the museums have worked intelligently with sponsors to help them to realise their ideals.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Does my hon. Friend agree that the most exciting regional museum to be opened last year—it was opened last May by Her Majesty the Queen—was the Tullie House museum in Carlisle? That excellent museum was conceived by the Labour-controlled council despite Conservative opposition.

Mr. Fisher: Yes. The Tullie House museum undoubtedly made last year a special year for the north of England. It is exciting when a brand-new public sector museum opens. Having visited Tullie House, I can confirm that, as my hon. Friend says, it is remarkable, and I commend it to hon. Members on both sides of the House. It contains an extraordinary collection, beautifully presented, and any hon. Members who find themselves in Carlisle would do well to spend a few hours there. They would enjoy themselves very much.

In spite of the Government's hostility to local authorities, and their attitude to local authority finance, local authorities have managed to expand the service in that way—yet the Government have not. It is true that things have happened above the ground at the Tate, but the Government's responsibilities for its fabric—the wiring, the structure, the roofs and so on—have been appallingly neglected.

The Government are in an extraordinarily poor position to congratulate themselves on an annus mirabilis. The Minister made a half-hearted attempt to justify that claim, but he could not identify anything that he or the Government had positively done.

I should like to examine one or two points, and invite the Minister to comment upon them before the Bill receives a Second Reading. The Minister skated over the details of the boards. Their size satisfies everybody—they are small—and the boards of trustees of all the museums have shown that they have the right ability and expertise, and are working well. However, the Minister knows that all the galleries—certainly the Tate and the national gallery—have told him strongly that the Government have the term of the trusteeships wrong.

The Bill says that the term of a trusteeship should be five years, yet, as the Minister knows, the director of the Tate gallery, and the trustees of the Tate and of the

[Mr. Fisher]

national galleries have made strong representations that, for good sound reasons, that term should be seven years. The trustees and the directors say that it takes two to three years to get the feel of the responsibilities—those responsibilities are considerably greater these days—and to work one's way in and become able to contribute fully. To identify a new chairperson for the board, or to derive full value from bringing on those trustees, five years is too short.

The Minister may say that the trusteeship can be renewed for a further five years, but I see no reason why he has resisted the expert opinion of the trustees and directors of the museums. The term appears to have been fixed on the Minister's personal whim. I am not sure whether he received any evidence from anybody else—from the Museums and Galleries Commission, or from any board of trustees or any director—to support his idea for a period of five years.

If the Minister can identify any objective professional evidence that five years is the period needed, that would be very interesting, but I believe that all the expert evidence that he received supported a period of seven years. It is extraordinary that the Minister should take it into his head that he knows better than people in the museums world, and impose upon them a period that nobody asked for —indeed, everybody asked for the opposite. Perhaps he will answer those questions when he replies.

Clause 4 is undoubtedly the key to the Bill. It deals with disposals, and the implications of disposals. For the first time the Bill gives galleries powers of disposal, subject to certain conditions—or rather it gives such powers to the Tate and the national portrait gallery, but not to the Wallace collection or the national gallery.

The Opposition have no quarrel with the principle of disposal, leaving aside the financial implications. Undoubtedly, if Parliament empowers trustees and directors to use their artistic judgment and professional experience to acquire works of art on behalf of their galleries, it is logical to trust them to use that same judgment to dispose of works of art. In a neutral world, unaffected by other considerations, that would be correct. We should trust the judgment of people such as Mr. MacGregor and Mr. Serota.

However, there are genuine fears. The Minister knows that opinion is well split in the museums world. The national gallery told the Minister's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Shoreham—no doubt the arguments were repeated to the Minister personally by many of the trustees and directors of the museums—that they did not want powers of disposal—not because they did not trust their own intellectual judgment, but, following the line set down in the Museums and Galleries Commission's 1988 report on the national gallery, because those powers should not be forced on the galleries. The trustees asked that Parliament should not confer such powers on them.

That was the view of the MGC in 1988, and I understand that it remains the view of many of the directors, not because of the matter of intellectual judgment or scholarship, but because of fears that the Government will seek to put pressure on their finances.

The Minister has gone some way towards allaying those fears by adding the proviso that any money from disposals should be used for the acquisition of further works. However, that leaves the galleries open to pressure, when they come to the Minister and make points such as that which I made at the beginning of my speech—saying, for instance, that last year the Tate gallery could buy only one work of art. In future the Minister will be able to refer to the Bill and say, "Parliament has given you the power to dispose of works of art, if you wish to acquire more—and, in using those receipts from disposals, you are specifically confined to making further acquisitions."

If those at the Tate do not believe that the acquisition of one picture a year is sufficient to keep its contemporary art collection up to date, the Government could tell them to use the powers in the Bill to dispose of works of art. Directors of galleries are worried about that.

The Minister may say that that argument is unreasonable. He may turn the argument on those galleries by saying that, in effect, they are admitting that they do not have any works of art that are available or appropriate for disposal. The Minister might then argue, with some validity, that huge revenue is not to be gained from such disposals. That would be a good debating ploy. However, the fact is that if the directors of galleries wish to raise money the Minister can refer them to the Bill and powers contained in clause 4. That is worrying in view of the way in which the Government have handled the purchasing grant—the acquisition grant—of the galleries in the past few years.

As part of the Minister's annus mirabilis—no doubt he would say that there have been 12 anni mirabilis; I think that that is right——

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Fisher: I am glad that I got that right.

In the past seven years, the acquisition grants of the galleries have been frozen. The national portrait gallery now gets £310,000. In cash terms that is exactly the same as the amount it received seven years ago. The Tate gallery gets £1·8 million, which is exactly the same as it got in 1984-85. The national gallery gets £2·75 million, the same as it received seven years ago and rather less than it received 10 years ago. During that time the allocation to that gallery has been reduced, and subsequently frozen. The Wallace is the exception because it has not been asked to increase its collection. The other three galleries, however, have experienced a Government who have said, effectively, "We don't want you to buy works of art. We believe that your acquisition money should be frozen at the 1984 level." However, the Bill requires those galleries to buy works of art, but it will take a long time to make such acquisitions.

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): Surely the test of all this is not necessarily how big the Government grant for acquisitions is but what the galleries are able to acquire. I would support strongly a bigger Government grant for acquisitions because there are many good uses to which it could be put. Although the national gallery has had a limited grant, it has, by various means available to it, acquired not only a marvellous new building, but many great works of art.

Mr. Fisher: I was just about to make that point and I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman raised it.

Given the way in which the grant works, the national gallery is only able to buy works on instalments. The right hon. Gentleman follows such matters closely and he will be aware that the typical price of the major works that the national gallery must buy is several millions. At the moment that gallery is engaged—I use the word advisedly—in purchasing an important Cuyp landscape. It is worth £8 million and the gallery has had to purchase it through three annual instalments negotiated with the previous owners. That is the only way it can acquire that one work. In addition to the third instalment on the Cuyp, the national gallery has made the first instalment on a Cranage painting. That is the way in which the gallery has to operate.

If the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) inquires of the trustees and directors of either the national or the Tate he will be told in no uncertain terms that it is extremely unsatisfactory that they cannot acquire the sort of painting that they need to keep their collections fresh and up to date. They will also raise a much more important issue with him.

It is not only a matter of those galleries buying great emblematic works of art. The thing that makes British museums and galleries so exciting and unique is that, unlike American ones, they have a duty to collect not just the high spots of any period, but the average, sometimes even the bad, works of art which represent the context from which the great works of art arose. When one visits a gallery it is important to look at the great works in the context of their period. If the right hon. Gentleman talks to those directors, they will back what I say.

Sir Timothy Raison *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Fisher: The right hon. Gentleman may disagree, but that is true.

The Government's attitude has made it difficult for galleries to acquire the keynote works that they need. It has been almost impossible for them to acquire the artistic infrastructure that should surround those works so that they can be seen in the right scholarship context.

Sir Timothy Raison: I accept that many museums are concerned with acquiring such context works, but the national gallery is in the business, quite rightly, of acquiring the very finest works. The hon. Gentleman has said that it is in the process of acquiring two incredibly beautiful works and the point is that it is acquiring them even though they cost much more than the nominal amount of Government grant available. With the aid of the national art collections fund and other means, the galleries can raise other resources to acquire the finest works. We would like them to acquire more, of course, but they do not have a bad record.

Mr. Fisher: The right hon. Gentleman and I will have to disagree about the difficulties that those galleries face. I would be surprised if he did not agree with me that it is wrong that the Tate can buy only one picture a year. That is apart from the fact that it cannot fill any holes in its Picasso, Matisse or Henry Moore collections.

The Tate cannot even afford works by fine living British artists like Howard Hodgkin. Such works are out of the range of the Tate's powers of acquisition. If the Tate is unable to buy the works of young British artists, as it should, its collections will be enormously deficient. That is especially significant as it is the key contemporary house of 20th century works of art in Britain.

Mr. Renton: I noted what my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) said and it is interesting that, in reply, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) has tried to sit on both sides of the fence on the difficult question of acquisitions and disposals. He must declare his hand.

The Tate is primarily concerned with collecting contemporary art but it is never able to show more than from 23 to 25 per cent. of its collection at any time. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he would not give it the limited powers of disposal available in clause 4(4)(b)? The hon. Gentleman must declare his hand and say whether he is in favour of those disposal powers.

Mr. Fisher: We will discuss that clause in detail in Committee. I have already said that the Opposition support the Bill. We have a bipartisan approach to it. However, we have grave reservations about clause 4 if it is left in the hands of a Government who have a long track record of being mean with acquisition money.

The intellectual case for disposal is fine and if a Government take an intelligent view about the need to buy new pictures it poses no danger. However, this Government have frozen, deliberately, purchase grants even in the past three years when the Minister has had funds at his disposal. He has increased funds to the Arts Council, so why has he not unfrozen the acquisition grants?

I have said several times that we will not oppose the Bill. If it does not pass through the House before the general election, the next Labour Government will pick it up and enact it. However, the difference is that the powers of disposal in clause 4 will then stem from a Labour Government who have a strong commitment to expand collections rather than to freeze acquisition funds. The Minister cannot duck the fact that, even in the years when he had some money from the Chief Secretary to dispose on our arts and cultural life, he deliberately chose not to unfreeze the purchase grants of the galleries. I am not surprised that the Minister looks away with some embarrassment. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Minister finds that worthy of a chuckle. If he finds it amusing that he did not unfreeze acquisition grants even in the years when he had the money to do so, he is in a bad way. The Government's record on acquiring works of art in those important national museums is nothing short of a disgrace, and the Bill does nothing to deal with the problem.

Towards the end of his speech, the Minister slipped in a remark about the change to indemnities that the Government have introduced. In case the Minister is becoming a little hard of hearing, I repeat that we welcome that change and believe that the Minister was wrong to put that provision in the Bill in the first place. He said that he received representations from directors and trustees last week. Will he confirm that, even until early yesterday afternoon, he was saying that that part of the Bill would stand? That is certainly what I have heard. I do not know what happened later yesterday afternoon to change his mind but I am delighted that it has been changed. He may inadvertently have misrepresented the position slightly because he gave the impression that representations were made just a week or so ago and that now he had changed his mind. Representations about the problems that accrue from that matter were made to him long before last week. I do not wish to put the Minister in an embarrassing position in case he changes his mind, but I am delighted that the Government have withdrawn the provision, even

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though the Minister did not present the full picture. Nevertheless, I congratulate him on having had the courage to withdraw the provision. He was right to do so because it would be better to return to the conditions that pertain under the National Heritage Act 1980.

Mr. Renton: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I first received representations from the directors in my box on Friday night when I returned from two days in Paris looking at the grands travaux.

Mr. Tony Banks: Oh.

Mr. Renton: I knew that the hon. Gentleman would appreciate that.

As for the remarks of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) about what happened yesterday afternoon, I am afraid that, in his rounds of the art galleries, the hon. Gentleman listens to too much gossip that comes out of SW1 at lunch times. That is where he happens to hear the little stories that he mentioned.

Mr. Fisher: Just as the House does not begrudge the Minister his long introductory remarks, it does not begrudge him his last trip to Paris as Minister. I hope that he enjoyed it, but I wish that he had gone earlier and had learnt from the French socialist Minister what a Government should do for the arts and how they should support it. I hope that he has learnt something from the majesty and beauty of some of those grands projets like Ieoh Pei's pyramid at the Louvre—*[Interruption.]* It is an extremely beautiful building. It is too late for the Minister to learn those lessons.

Sir Timothy Raison: In endorsing French socialist policy on the arts, does the hon. Gentleman support the French socialist policy of charging for museums?

Mr. Fisher: We do not support all the French Government's proposals. As the Minister fairly said, their museums have a different tradition. French museum curators envy us our wider access—or what was our wider access—and there is no reason why we should ape everything French. Although I have criticisms of Mr. Lang's policies, the French Government believe in the arts and the fact that Governments have a positive role to play, which is good. I am sad that the Minister has gone to Paris too late to be able to put into practice any of the lessons that he may have learnt.

Mr. Flannery: While respecting what the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) said, let me say that we had a tradition whereby we did not pay to enter museums. That tradition was laid down clearly at the beginning of the last century. France has a different tradition. I think that our tradition is better than the French tradition. Therefore, surely the right hon. Gentleman never dreamed that we would accede to jumping over and supporting their tradition, whether it has come from a socialist Government or not.

Mr. Fisher: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend.

The Bill has been around for a long time and received much attention from the previous Minister, the right hon. Member for Shoreham. It is extraordinary that, after such a long period of gestation, the Bill should come to the House imperfect so that the Minister must make a change at five minutes to midnight. He has been rather arrogant in failing to listen to the perfectly objective and non-partisan advice of trustees and directors about the term of trustees. I hope that he will consider that again in Committee and that we can return to him on that point.

Although we support the Bill and feel that it is a useful measure, with one or two provisos that I have already mentioned, we do not support the neglect that the Government have displayed towards those museums, their purchasing grants, repairs, maintenance, salaries, the gap between their grants and their obligations, and the fact that the shadow of charging lies over all of them from their other national museum colleagues. The Government's record on the care of museums has been nothing short of a disgrace for the past 10 years. The museums world cannot wait until 9 April for a change of Government. They will then get a Government who believe in museums and who do not make the type of extraordinary remark that the Minister made when he said:

> "Museums should compete with sports grounds for scholarship and education".

Can any Tory Member explain what the Minister meant by those words? They sum up the confusion, lack of policy and lack of clarity of the Minister's policies in the past year and of the Government's policies in the past 10 years. It is better that the Government go and we have a Government committed to improving our museums in the 1990s.

5.27 pm

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): Although I support the Bill enthusiastically, my support is not unqualified. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister accept a warm and generous tribute on bringing the Bill to the House this afternoon? Irrespective of what has been said in the past half an hour, I believe that he has given an excellent account of his stewardship of the arts on behalf of this country.

Furthermore, I see in the Bill the handprint of my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce). I shall always have tremendous affection and admiration for his work over a long period as Minister for the Arts. Against that background, I am not prepared—in the House, the country or a general election—to take the criticism that we have heard from the Opposition.

When we consider the Government's track record, we hear a great hallelujah from the arts world. They say that the Conservative Government and the two Ministers I have mentioned gave them a three-year programme and that they could not have gone on, year by year, living hand to mouth with no opportunity to plan and create policies. We brought into being a three-year programme and then added to it a rolling programme to ensure an overlap and continuity.

Mr. Flannery: The hon. Gentleman will be happy to know that the Select Committee on the Arts fought for that policy for years. As it forms part of the public and private funding of the arts—a major import—we dealt with all those aspects. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Shoreham for his work, and I profoundly agree about the three-year period because the one-year period simply did not work.

Dr. Blackburn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. I think that he would also agree that we have no vested interest in the subject. I openly confess that I do not care whether the concept came from the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) or my right hon. Friend the Minister—I simply rejoice that it is there, and I believe that my rejoicing is echoed in the arts world.

Public interest in the arts has grown enormously throughout the country during the past decade. Government policies—exemplified in the Bill—have resulted in increased Government funding. Let us quietly and soberly think about this "disgraceful Government" who have neglected the arts. By the same token, they have given a 30 per cent. increase in real terms in funding for the arts. I should like to see more such neglect; I want such neglect from a Conservative Government—they have increased funding by 38 per cent. in real terms, and they support the arts world. I believe that the arts constitute the life blood of society. They help to create character and enhance education. It is a blessing to have men and women with gift and talent in the arena of the arts.

The Government have also given those in the arts greater opportunity to be masters of their own destinies. Do people object to that? We have heard time and again this afternoon that the wicked Conservative Government have no interest in the arts and are philistines. Let us consider what they have done. They have stated that funding of the arts can be encouraged from the private sector. It just so happens that my London home is adjacent to the Tate gallery, and as I pass there, morning and evening——

Mr. Flannery: So do I.

Dr. Blackburn: As does the hon. Gentleman.

As I pass the Tate gallery, I unashamedly salute Barclays bank, Shell and the other companies that sponsor the arts. Instead of condemning them, we should support and salute them as they give funds, which is wonderful. The private sector contributed £500,000 12 years ago. I gently and respectfully disagree with my right hon. Friend the Minister, who said that the funds now stood at more than £40 million. I believe that the figure is even higher than that.

I support the arts, which are precious to me; I support a Government who will support the arts as this Government have, and I salute anyone who is prepared to sponsor the arts. Those simple facts are enhanced by the Minister saying in clear terms that he wants value for money. That is a good expression for us all to live with. In order to get value for money for the Government's record amount of arts funding, the Minister says that the Government will streamline them and make them efficient. He reduced the number of local arts councils from 12 to 10. I have heard of no adverse effects as a result of that modest streamlining—other hon. Members can give their own accounts.

The arts are the greatest blessing for people, both young and old, in forming their education and scholarship, and also in creating their character. I do not believe that anyone could visit the Clore gallery, spend two hours there and come out without their lives being enriched, irrespective of their standing in society. They all have the common desire to search for knowledge, and appreciate the beauty of the arts.

By its very nature, the Bill centres on the metropolis, which I welcome. Like everyone else, I am proud to say that we are striving to make the metropolis the centre of the arts world. That is why, when we make foolish criticisms, we should stop and consider that 1·5 million people go to the Tate gallery each year—there has been a modest increase of 2 per cent. in that figure in the past year. Large numbers of people also visit the national gallery and other such institutions. I am sure that other hon. Members will say amen to that and make a better contribution than I am.

I have pledged myself as a disciple of the Bill. With my gift of prophecy I foresee that, after 9 April, the same Minister will be sitting on the same Front Bench representing the Conservative party. I want him to go on producing such measures, because the arts are alive north of Watford.

Clause 2(1)(b) is the soul of the Bill. If I had to choose one part of the Bill I would stand by its aim of securing

"that the works of art are exhibited to the public".

That is what art is about—exhibiting to the public. It has been openly confessed that 75 per cent. of the works collected in the Tate, apart from those used for research and those on travelling exhibitions, remain in the bowels of the gallery, which I find offensive. I utterly agree that we should

"secure that the works of art are exhibited to the public".

It is no use me standing here and saying that that is what I want. I have an obligation as a Member of Parliament to support and implement that policy. At 2.30 this afternoon, I telephoned the art gallery in the town that I have the honour to represent—Dudley. I spoke to the art gallery's curator and said, "It is within my knowledge that the greatest work of art that you have in this modest little provincial art gallery is that of Joseph Mallord William Turner." To which he replied, "Yes." I asked, "When is it to be exhibited?" He said, "Monday, sir." In my humble, modest way, perhaps my phone call has ensured that a work of art is shown where people of the black country can see it, which is what it is all about. I would get just as much support for that if I were a Labour Member—my aim is to show people our wonderful gifts. We must exhibit, exhibit, exhibit—that is our role in the arts world.

Clause 7 deals with donations. I thank God for all donators, no matter how high or humble, who donate their works, talents, gifts and products to the nation. In the middle of the last century there was a man whose father walked from Devon to London to find a job and opened a barber's shop in Covent Garden. He married the butcher's girl from next door, and as a result of that union Joseph Mallord William Turner was born. When he died in Chelsea, he left £180,000 and his desire was that the money should be given to support the young artists of this country which he loved. His second request was that all his works be given to the nation.

Mr. Fisher: And exhibited free of charge.

Dr. Blackburn: I am delighted that there is a common bond between us. Turner offered his life's work to the nation on condition that it be exhibited to the public free. The second condition was that the works of art should be housed as one collection. That dream was not realised until 1 April 1987, when, thanks to the generosity of the trustees of Mr. Clore, the Queen opened the Clore gallery. I have always been humbled and thrilled by that event, which represented the culmination of a wonderful life and donation to the nation.

[Dr. Blackburn]

I want the Minister to write to me explaining the position of the Clore gallery. I want to know the general position of donations to the nation by men of talent such as the one I have described.

This is an historic day in the life of the arts in this country. I wish the Bill godspeed. I am sure that one day, in our quiet moments, each of us who was involved in its passage will be able to say, as we pass the national gallery, the national portrait gallery, the Wallace collection or the Tate gallery, that we are glad of our stewardship in the honourable House that brought about this Bill.

Finally, I should like to express a personal "thank you" to the Minister.

5.42 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I cannot quite match the feeling with which the hon. Member for Dudley, West (Dr. Blackburn) spoke, nor have I ever been moved, on pasing down the Embankment, to salute Barclays bank, British Petroleum or any other company. I have always been glad that many public companies have been willing to contribute to the arts, but I also recognise that they do so for not entirely altruistic reasons. They derive considerable kudos from such support, and there are also corporation tax advantages to be had from being generous to the arts and sport.

I do not wish to join in the orgy of self-congratulation that appears to have broken out on the Government Benches, but I do agree with the part of the speech by the hon. Member for Dudley, West in which he drew attention to clause 2, which aims to secure that works of art are exhibited to the public. Quite so; it is precisely because of my anxiety that that may not always happen that I rise to make one or two criticisms of the Bill.

First, however, I congratulate the Minister on having dropped clause 10, with the new section 16A(10), which would have made it more difficult for members of the public to see certain works of art exhibited in this country and abroad. That subsection would have made it less likely that works of art, particularly expensive ones that had to be insured at great cost, would be swapped temporarily or for long periods between galleries in this country and in the world at large.

If it is our aim to ensure that the public can see works of art, anything that can be done to enable works of art to be moved around the country and around the world so that as many people as possible get to see them is desirable —so the Government opted for the best solution by dropping new section 16A(10). I wait to see what the Minister will table by way of substitution. My experience is that the Government sometimes substitute parts of Bills with provisions that are just as objectionable as the original parts that gave rise to complaint. We will wait and see.

I want to address the House on the question of disposals, and particularly on disposals policy as it relates to the national galleries of Scotland. Of course there will be occasions when galleries will want to dispose of works of art. I am not an expert in the art world; some people would even call me a philistine—my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) has often done so. I am the same as any other member of the public: I know what I like and do not like, or at least I think I do.

I have found it difficult to join in what is known as the arts world or in the gatherings of art critics who tell us what is good and what is bad. I am certainly not in a position to say which up-and-coming artists should have their works included in an exhibition. I have always suspected that the successful ones were those who had attended the right wine and cheese parties. In any event, that is a matter for others, not for this House.

I am worried that museums and galleries may be put in the invidious position of having to sell works of art that they want to keep in order to finance their continuing collection of new works of art. Worse still, they should not have to sell works of art to make ends meet.

In 1985, the national gallery of Scotland was given a power that it never sought, enabling it to dispose of works of art. Some two years after the passage of legislation, one of the trustees wrote to *The Times* pointing out that they did not want the power and drawing attention to the fact that the Scottish Education Department had referred to the power in the 1985 legislation when considering the funding of the national galleries of Scotland.

It seems perfectly obvious to me that, if art galleries are expected to dispose of works of art, the Government of the day will try to lean on the trustees or management of the institutions concerned to ensure that they sell works of art to fund day-to-day running costs or new acquisitions. That is thoroughly undesirable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central has already mentioned the problem that the Tate gallery may face because it will have a power of disposal that the national gallery does not have. It is difficult to legislate to specify exactly when a work of art can be sold and when it cannot, but I hope that we can agree that it would be deeply regrettable if works of art were sold into private collections with the result that people could never see them again. People acquire works of art sometimes to look at them but as often as not as assets. They might just as well own gold bars in a basement or a bank—they possess a work of art that no one will see. It will be regrettable if works of art now on display pass into private ownership and remain out of sight for years or even for centuries.

I want to refer to the problem that the national gallery of Scotland faces. The Minister said that the Bill primarily deals with the national gallery, the Tate, the national portrait gallery and the Wallace collection, bodies for which he has direct ministerial responsibility. The national gallery of Scotland falls within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is not here. One might imagine that he had a great interest in national museums and art galleries, because he and his colleagues may find themselves hung in such institutions quite soon, so it would not be in their interests to put at risk their portraits or monuments by allowing them to be sold into private collections in years to come, when people have forgotten what they ever looked like. No Scottish Minister is here today, so the Minister for the Arts must answer the points that I am about to make, because the Scottish galleries are mentioned all too briefly in this Bill.

The national gallery of Scotland faces the problem that, because it has the power to dispose of works of art, pressure will be brought to bear, as it has been already, to force it to dispose of works of art so as to fund its day-to-day activities or new acquisitions. The more serious problem is that it has already been made clear to the gallery that it will not receive a donation because the donor is not prepared to run the risk that his donation will go from the gallery into private hands.

This morning, I met Sir Denis Mahon, who is well known in the arts world. He told me that he is in an invidious position. He wants to donate a 17th-century Italian work of art to the national gallery of Scotland, but he does not want to run the risk that the gallery may be forced to sell it, or that the trustees will sell it on so that it is lost to public view. That is extremely serious, because art galleries depend on donations to fulfil their functions and the national gallery of Scotland may not receive a donation because the Government have given it powers which it did not want, for which it did not ask and which are downright dangerous.

When he responded to the point that I made in an intervention, the Minister seemed uninterested. He said first that his Department had never heard of the problem. When pressed, he conceded that the Scottish Office had mentioned it, but, happily in his view, an official had come up with the view that, because of a technicality, the matter could not be dealt with in the Bill.

However, I should like to press it upon the Minister that this is an extremely serious matter. There is no reason why the national gallery of Scotland should be more disadvantaged than the equivalent gallery in England. If it is good enough for there to be strong controls on the national gallery in England, why should not the same controls exist for a comparable gallery in Scotland?

I shall be complimentary to the Minister, which is more than he was to me. He knows something about Scotland. I know that, since taking up office, he has visited Scotland two or three times. Indeed, I think that he owns or leases a part of Scotland on one of the islands. He must realise that there is a thriving arts world in Edinburgh and other parts of Scotland, particularly Glasgow. The hon. Member for Dudley, West is no longer with us, but he made the point that there is a strong feeling outside London that the Government and the critics who write in London newspapers do not understand that there are thriving arts communities north of the M25.

No one can understand why the national gallery of Scotland was given powers so detrimental to its functions and so highly damaging, especially when the gallery has been faced with the problem that it will not get an important donation because of powers which it did not want but which the Government forced on it. It follows from this that I should like the Government to table a suitable amendment to the Bill, and I am confident that one can be found, to enable the national gallery of Scotland to be on exactly the same footing—not in a more favourable one—as equivalent galleries in England.

The Minister spoke of hybridity and this point has already been raised. The definition of a hybrid Bill is:

> "a public Bill which affects a particular private interest in a manner different from the private interest of other persons or bodies of the same category or class".

If the Bill can affect the private interest of four galleries in England, how can it be said to be hybrid if it were to affect the private interest of one Scottish gallery? The Minister should ask his officials to look at this matter again.

I do not know what will happen in Committee. I hope that an amendment will be tabled. If necessary, it will have to be spoken to at great length. The Minister should not get off the hook by fobbing off the problem that the national gallery of Scotland faces on the basis of a dubious legal technicality.

That speaks volumes for the lack of interest and inactivity of the Scottish Office, which has not been prepared to advocate this cause with enthusiasm. The Scottish Office was alerted to the problem some months ago, but obviously it has done nothing about it. No Minister from the Scottish Office has turned up today. This Minister is clearly not briefed on the subject. This matter, like many others, could be adequately dealt with in a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh.

Those in the Minister's Department did not know about the problem, so it was not a problem, because it was out of sight of the galleries that they see in London and with which they are terribly familiar. They should remember that there are art galleries outside London which should be catered for.

I hope the Minister will consider this point when the matter comes to Committee, or it will have to be pressed again and again. I do not know whether this was inadvertent, but I am sure that it was due to lack of interest and incompetence. I assure the Minister that it is deeply resented, and it is harmful to the interests of the national gallery of Scotland. It is in the interests of the whole of the United Kingdom that we should have galleries in London and Scotland to collect and maintain works of art that the public can see, and that is not happening.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman is deeply unjust. I answered his points completely and quickly and told him that the matter was under consideration by the Secretary of State for Scotland and does not come directly to me. As I understand it, the problem is one of hybridity, and the hon. Gentleman should know this and give credence to it. The other Scottish national institutions—the national library and the national museum—have not found any problems with the disposal powers given to them under the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act 1991. I have a full brief on this matter, and I know that the director of the national gallery of Scotland has recently raised it.

The hon. Gentleman described his conversation this morning with Sir Denis Mahon, and the possible bequest by Sir Denis to the national gallery of Scotland. The hon. Gentleman claimed that Sir Denis might not make that bequest if the disposal powers of the national gallery of Scotland were not changed to those that we are giving to the national galleries affected by the Bill. Why does not the gift of Sir Denis Mahon go to the national gallery of Scotland under a strict trust, binding in law on the trustees, that does not permit the picture to be sold? Why not follow that route?

Mr. Darling: The Minister might just as well apply the logic of that argument to the national gallery in London. If it is good enough for Edinburgh, it is good enough for London. I think that Sir Denis would find it unreasonable that, as a donor, he should be cautioned before doing anything else, and certainly before parting with a work of art, to go to a trust lawyer, no doubt an expensive one, to draw up the so-called trust. That is unreasonable.

The Minister did not say that the Secretary of State for Scotland was considering the matter. If the Secretary of State is considering it, I would welcome that, but the Minister rather gave the impression that the matter had been considered and then dismissed, because of the

[Mr. Darling]

hybridity argument. We shall wait to see what will happen in Committee, but, having had some dealings with the Minister in his previous job but one, I am not particularly optimistic.

The Minister also mentioned the national library of Scotland—perhaps I should declare an interest as a trustee of the library—which has slightly different problems. Now that the national gallery of Scotland may not be getting a bequest that it had previously been offered, we should be on our guard and deal with such problems.

The Minister's use of such a poor argument is unimpressive. Judging by his demeanour, I am not optimistic, but we can return to the matter in Committee, where it will no doubt be pursued. I just hope that the Minister accepts that there is genuine concern. A small amendment would solve the problem. If the only argument is hybridity, and if that argument could be overcome, a suitable amendment, perhaps framed by the Minister's draftsman, would be welcomed.

There is a general welcome for the Bill. I cannot comment on that because I do not profess any knowledge of the majority of it. For the sake of completeness, and as the Minister was trumpeting his achievements and rather belittling those of local authorities, I should make this point. Next time he comes to Scotland—I feel that it will be under his own steam—perhaps he will look around Edinburgh. In addition to the national gallery and the national portrait gallery, the Edinburgh district council has done a tremendous job in building the local arts in Edinburgh. We were the first in Britain to get the Chinese exhibition "The Emperor's Warriors", although one would not have known it from reading the arts critics based here in London. We had "Pharaoh's Gold" and many other exhibitions. That is a splendid example of what a local authority can do in partnership with a public gallery and private money. I hope that the Minister will not belittle that. It ill becomes the Government to belittle the efforts being made by local authorities.

I end where I started. If clause 2 is to have some meaning and the public are to have access to the arts, the Minister should think again, particularly with regard to the problem faced by the national gallery of Scotland to which I have drawn his attention.

5.59 pm

Sir Richard Luce (Shoreham): I strongly welcome the Bill and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts on its introduction. It is his achievement, not mine. For a long time I wanted such a Bill to be introduced and it is my right hon. Friend's achievement to have produced it in a form that deserves the support of the House. I am glad that the Opposition intend to support the Bill.

After 20 months it is nice to have another glimpse of the familiar debates on arts matters in the House. Nothing much has changed. The Government continue to display a fine record and to build up that record to make our achievement over the past 12 years even finer. The Opposition continue to lash around, looking back to the past in a rather neolithic fashion, being rather disparaging about patrons and going on about charges when they know perfectly well, as my right hon Friend says, that that is a matter of choice for the trustees of the individual museums; looking back in anger.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) is fascinated by the arts world and he knows a lot about it, but he does himself and the Labour party a disservice when he launches into an attack on areas of Government policy on the arts where our achievement is remarkable. For example, we have been working jointly with the private and public sectors in building up the great success story of our museums and galleries. The hon. Gentleman fairly said that he would like to examine the Government's policies, for which I had a heavy responsibility, on, for example, the freezing of purchase grants for institutions on which I followed the policy of my predecessor, as has my right hon. Friend. It is perfectly legitimate to examine such a matter, and before I conclude I shall suggest the right way forward for the 1990s, but the hon. Gentleman does himself and his party a great disservice when he attacks the Government in areas where there has clearly been a remarkable achievement.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is not here. He is a familiar part and pattern of our debates on the arts, but he intervened earlier when he referred to the natural history museum. He and I have had many an exchange on that subject and on many others. A great compliment was paid me when a journalist on *The Guardian*, writing a piece which was intended to attack me bitterly on my policies on the arts, came to the conclusion in the last paragraph that

> "The best way to deal with Mr. Luce as Minister for the Arts is to have him stuffed and placed in the Natural History museum."

I cannot think of a nicer compliment. Long after the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central has disappeared from the parliamentary scene and has been forgotten, in 200 years' time my great great grandchildren will go to the natural history museum and pay a good charge to contribute to improvements to that museum to see their ancestor who was once Minister for the Arts. I am proud of my association with the natural history museum.

I support the concept behind the Bill and the work that my right hon. Friend has been doing. He has already struck a real chord in the arts world. He is clearly a man who knows about, understands, and has a great feeling and love for the arts. That has come across clearly. He is now, brick by brick, constructing further the Government's policy to help the arts to achieve even greater things. I congratulate him on that and I look forward to congratulating him in three and a half years' time on breaking my record of five years in office. I hope that he has a long time in the job.

The Bill refers particularly to the four great national galleries and confirms the policy of encouraging a diversity of funding for those institutions. That principle is singularly important. That is why I was critical of so many Opposition Members for being so disparaging about patrons such as the Sainsbury family who have done wonderful things for our arts.

Firmly embedded in the Bill is the principle that we should be able to manage our museums in a businesslike fashion; that they should be able to diversify their money so that they are not completely dependent on the Government, although the grant in aid is important; that they should be able to charge if they wish, but if not, that is fair enough and that they should make good use of the commercial activities that can be based in such institutions, whether cafes or shops, and to encourage sponsorship.

Mr. Fisher: Before the right hon. Gentleman goes on to his next point, I am sure that he would not wish to misrepresent the Opposition's case. At no point in my remarks, today or previously, have I disparaged patrons. Indeed, I join the Minister in paying tribute to people such as the Sainsbury brothers for their generosity to the national gallery and to Mr. Clore and his daughter, Mrs. Vivien Duffield, for the Clore gallery. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that I made no criticism of the generosity of such people. The nation owes them a great debt.

Sir Richard Luce: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has intervened and made clear his position. I was referring to some of the sedentary remarks during the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Minister when he was referring to the patrons. I am delighted that he has given such robust support to our patrons of the arts.

My right hon. Friend referred to the record of refurbishment in the institutions, and that record is remarkable. It has been achieved by joint funding from the public and private sectors. The Sainsbury wing is a remarkable achievement and there is the new Berggruen collection, the refurbishment of the national portrait gallery, the new Tate gallery in Liverpool and all the great efforts that are being made to extend the accessibility of paintings to other parts of the country. My right hon. Friend has contributed to the extension of the St. Ives school of painting and the Tate gallery in the north. I am also glad that he mentioned Lord Wilson and the plan to invest about £20 million for the improvement of our museums and galleries. All that is good and remarkable progress in the right direction.

The way in which my right hon. Friend has dealt with the question of disposals is right. I took the view that after a period of consultation with the institutions one should seek to tailor the policy of disposals to the interests, history and traditions of a particular institution. The Wallace collection is of its own kind; there are no acquisitions or disposals. The national gallery has another set of proposals and the Tate gallery another. That is the way to deal with the problem.

If we are not to adopt a policy of radical disposals, a policy of great freedom, the mobility and accessibility of our works of art is vital. The provisions in the Bill to improve indemnity and to encourage the transfer of objects to other institutions are an important contribution. It would be helpful if my right hon. Friend could say something more when he replies about the Government's encouragement of more touring and exhibiting of works of art.

I reached the conclusion some time ago that, regardless of the complexion of the Government, there is never adequate money for acquisitions, getting the fabric of our great national institution in an ideal state, and saving important works of art. The demands and pressures from Departments concerned with education, health, and other sectors are such that those three objectives cannot ever be wholly met by the taxpayers. I agree therefore with my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) that the best way forward in the 1990s is the introduction of a national lottery. The sooner that the Government commit themselves to one, the better it will be for the arts, sport and other interests.

A national lottery must never be seen as a substitute for public expenditure on the arts, but as a way of adding formidably to available resources.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I have always regarded the right hon. Gentleman as a distinguished holder of the office of Minister for the Arts and I agree that sponsorship money must continue to be available. There would be so much demand for the resources available from a national lottery that I am not sure how much would be used for the purposes that the right hon. Gentleman and I have in mind. There is no real alternative to public funding.

Sir Richard Luce: Let us be clear. The Government have a remarkably good record on arts funding and there is no doubt that their commitment to maintaining support through taxpayers' money remains. However, we seek greater diversity of resources, which would strengthen the arts still further. I do not see a national lottery as a substitute for public expenditure, but as a way of substantially supplementing overall available resources in areas that one would not expect the taxpayer wholly to finance.

I am glad to support the Bill and all the remarkable work done by the Minister. I may add, in what is probably my last contribution—[HON. MEMBERS: "No".]—in the House, at least on the arts, that anyone who has enjoyed the privilege of serving as Minister for the Arts cannot but help form a great affection for all those who work in them. They do a wonderful job for the millions more people who seek to enjoy the arts today than did 20 years or 30 years ago. The Bill will play a modest part in that process.

6.12 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I mean no discourtesy, but I will have to leave the Chamber after my brief contribution, because I have a meeting with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and that is important business.

The right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) did a good job as Minister for the Arts, despite the constraints imposed on him by the lunatic policies of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). It is touching that he wants to end up as an exhibit, like Jeremy Bentham —stuffed and put on display in the natural history museum. I am not sure that I would pay money to see him, but perhaps the right hon. Gentleman realises we would like him to go now—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—and undergo that process of taxidermy. I may add that we on this side of the House intend at the general election to stuff the whole Conservative party.

We have no ideological hang-up about private sponsorship of the arts. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) has often said, we are quite prepared to accept additional resources from that quarter. However, as the right hon. Member for Shoreham said, they must be truly additional, and not be used to replace core funding.

Areas such as my own—and we have the Theatre Royal in Stratford—find it difficult to secure business sponsorship. We have some, and we are most grateful for the money that we receive from the London electricity board and the London Docklands development corporation.

[Mr. Tony Banks]

However, the total sum is not very great. Thanks to Government policies, the recession has not left much of an industrial base to which an appeal for additional funds can be made. It is not easy trying to raise supplementary resources.

The Minister quoted a figure for business sponsorship ranging from £500,000 to £40 million. While that is welcome news, one would like more evidence and detail to be certain that that is not simply a guesstimate by the Minister's officials.

Mr. Renton: That estimate was not mine, but that of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts. I am sure that it will give the hon. Gentleman full details, if he requests them.

Mr. Banks: I am not altogether satisfied from the way those figures are collated that they present an entirely accurate picture. I will let that pass, but we need to know that money is available, and that it is not simply a figure that the Government assume—on the basis of a random selection of statistics from ABSA—is available as top-up, not replacement, money.

The right hon. Member for Shoreham was probably alluding to my few remarks about the Sainsbury boys, to whom I referred as fat cats. They are—and they can certainly afford to give the support that they do. There is no such thing as a free lunch, either for the Sainsburys or for the arts, galleries, and museums—and not even for the right hon. Member for Shoreham. The money in question had to come from somewhere.

I was only suggesting that all the people who buy their baked beans or whatever at Sainsbury are making a contribution to the arts through the checkout tills. We are grateful for those resources, but we must remember that there are also tax breaks for those who put money into the arts privately, so we should not fall to our knees and fawn at the feet of those who have an awful lot of money at their disposal.

It is a good idea to allow galleries and museums to rationalise their collections from time to time, where there is an overlap. However, I am anxious that items for disposal should go to other public institutions, rather than to private collections. Perhaps we can draw out more detail on that aspect in Committee. Even an item that is in a reserve public collection and has been hidden away in a basement ought not to be sold to a private collection.

Concern might be felt also by those who intend to bequeath items to public museums and art galleries, on the understanding that they will be kept in the public domain. That is true also of land and other property of the kind mentioned in the Bill. If such a bequest has attached to it a codicil stating that it should not be disposed of to a private collection, the museum or gallery must decide whether it will accept the gift on those terms.

It would be cruel if people left their collection of cheese labels to a public institution, only to find after they have gone to the great museum in the sky, on looking down from their lofty heights, that their cheese labels were to be sold at Sotheby's or Christie's.

A plaque outside the Horniman states that it was bequeathed to the people of London as a free museum. If admission charges are imposed, that would clearly go against the good intentions of the individual who made the original bequest.

I would like to ask the Minister directly whether, if the Bill goes through, as one assumes that it will because we on the Opposition Benches will give it a fair wind, it will, for example, allow the British museum to lend to the new Acropolis museum in Athens the Elgin or Parthenon marbles. That is an interesting concept, because they would be on public display. The new Acropolis museum has been designed specifically to entice back the Parthenon marbles.

I am delighted that the leader of my party has said that that is what will happen, because it would be an act of great solidarity with our Greek friends. Many of us take holidays in Greece and we love the Greek people dearly. They would value and treasure far more their own national heritage, which we have got locked up in the British museum, than we do. We could have a polystyrene imitation of the marbles. I do not suppose that many people would notice the difference. In the meantime, those beautiful marbles could be restored to their rightful place in the wonderful city of Athens. Will this Bill assist such a transfer?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Member may recall what I told his hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling). If the hon. Member wishes to leave his collection of cheese labels to the Geffrye museum, under clause 4 it is not at all difficult for him to do so with a trust or condition prohibiting or restricting disposal of the cheese labels. In the case of the Tate gallery, for example, the Bill specifically allows people making gifts to put conditions on them to prevent their being disposed of; in such circumstances, the trustees would be unable to dispose of them.

Mr. Banks: I want to know that my collection of cheese labels will be safeguarded for posterity and not, after the years that I have spent accumulating them, peeling them off little triangles of processed cheese, ending up at Christie's and being distributed to private buyers round the world; so I am delighted by that assurance. We are making some progress here.

Clause 3(4) lists the objects of the national portrait gallery, which include the commissioning of "portraits of eminent British persons". I would like to record the fact that I commissioned from Feliks Topolski a wonderful painting of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). I took it round in a taxi to the national portrait gallery and the snooty buggers refused it. Here I was, doing my best for the arts, and they refused it. It is a fine example of Topolski's work, and I hope that this little plug for it tonight will induce the trustees to accept a fine painting, not only by a fine artist but of a fine subject as well.

I turn to the matter of museum charges. The Minister really must understand this, because he did not understand it in the course of the various interventions when he was speaking. We on the Opposition Benches do not oppose charging for special exhibitions; that has gone on for many years and will continue under a Labour Government. But it seemed to us wrong to change the ethos, the philosophy, of our museums, which is free access for general admission, as opposed to special exhibitions.

If the trustees are given adequate resources, there is no way that they would voluntarily impose a charging regime. That must be a fact, because so many people who run museums and art galleries have said so, both to me and to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central.

Charging is a bad move. It is no good saying that there has been no fall-off. There was an enormous fall-off in attendance immediately following the imposition of charges by museums. We cannot know who is not going, but we have to look round to see who is now unlikely to go. Many schools are no longer visiting museums, and many people who cannot afford even a modest admission charge will not go.

A charge is a disincentive. Museums and art galleries are a wonderful heritage. They were established by many far-sighted people to act as a source of inspiration and education for ordinary people. A charging regime deters those people from visiting. It is wrong, and I am glad to hear that those on our Front Bench, when in government, will make sure that no museum has to impose charges for general admission, even though we make exceptions for special exhibitions.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the chance to make a few comments. I will finish because I can see the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) straining at the leash, but I apologise for having to go off and see his colleague.

6.24 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), like all the Opposition Members who have spoken, is strongly opposed to charges for general admission to museums. At the same time he, like those other Opposition Members, is in favour of greatly increased expenditure on museums and particularly on the acquisition of new works of art. Given the enthusiasm of the Labour party for taxation and its opposition to charges, perhaps we might get round this particular problem if museums were allowed to impose a small tax on visitors; the ideological opposition to charges might be dissolved by this semantic device.

The debate so far has been enriched by the contributions of two distinguished Ministers for the Arts, the present incumbent and my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce). One of their greatest contributions has been the encouragement of private sponsorship for the national collections which has gone up from £500,000 to more than £40 million. This is to be enormously welcomed.

I also very much welcome the contribution made by the Sainsbury family. I recently visited their new wing. I salute the contribution that has been made by the Clore family and I have recently visited the Turner gallery. But I do not believe that we can expect private munificence on this great scale to continue in the future. At the same time, however, there are exciting possibilities just ahead for the expansion of both the national gallery and, in particular, the Tate.

A few weeks ago the Secretary of State for the Environment called for suggestions on the future of Somerset house, once the civil servants begin to withdraw from that great building. In the public mind Somerset house has been associated for many decades with personal records. Perhaps it would be appropriate if the national portrait gallery were to occupy part of it in the future.

The Sainsbury wing opened with an exhibition of the royal collection of paintings. The Queen's gallery at Buckingham palace has been a great success. The state apartments in Windsor castle are magnificent. Yet much of the royal collection is still not adequately housed and accessible to the public. It might be appropriate in the future if, under the auspices of the national gallery, part of the royal collection was on display in Somerset house.

My main concern is with the future of the Tate and, in particular, of the RAMC site which adjoins it on Millbank. Every time that I have driven past the site over the past decade, I have felt surprised that the Ministry of Defence continues to occupy it. I cannot believe that the RAMC, or indeed the Ministry as a whole, will continue to do so for the rest of the century. What will become of the site? Will yet another office block be built there? I feel that it has enormously exciting implications for the future of national collections and artistic life in the capital.

Yesterday, I received a letter from the director of the Tate gallery. The director wrote:

> "The trustees of the Tate Gallery are still developing a strategy for their building plans. This is not a simple task as any new framework will determine the shape of the gallery well into the twenty-first century. They hope to complete an outline strategy by the autumn of 1992. However, it is already apparent . . . that they wish to renew the emphasis on the role of the Tate as the national gallery of British art, as well as of modern art . . . that this will require the permanent display of the nation's existing large holdings of several British artists and not just of Turner alone . . . that such displays might be devoted to Hogarth, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Blake, Constable, the pre-Raphaelites, Watts, Spencer, Moore, Nash, Sutherland, Nicholson, Hepworth, Bacon, Hockney, etc. . . . that such displays will require a significant addition to the present building . . . and that the natural location for this additional space would be across Atterbury street on the present RAMC site."

The director of the Tate went on to say:

> "It would therefore make good sense for the Government to make a commitment to offer the first option on the RAMC site to the trustees of the Tate, when the site becomes available. An early commitment would allow the trustees to develop a plan which makes best use of available resources."

I agree. I believe that the Government should make the Millbank site available to the Tate for development when the RAMC moves out of its splendid headquarters and mess: it could provide accommodation for a number of artistic and heritage organisations that are currently scattered around the country. What we do not need is just another office block. I am afraid, however, that if and when the site is handed over to the land salesmen in the Ministry of Defence, a great opportunity will be lost for ever.

We do not know when the RAMC will leave Millbank, but we do know that the Ministry of Defence will be selling substantial quantities of land in London in the not-too-distant future. I hope that the Office of Arts and Libraries will keep in touch with the MOD in regard to the cultural and heritage importance of a number of sites; the MOD's land administrators do not have a notable record when it comes to imaginative use of sites for heritage purposes.

I agree with those who have said that the core of the Bill is contained in clause 4. Opposition Members have expressed doubts about the limited flexibility that is being given to the trustees of the Tate and the national portrait gallery to make disposals from their collections in certain very restricted circumstances. I consider that the clause is drawn too narrowly: I should like the powers of trustees to dispose of certain works to be widened somewhat.

[Sir Philip Goodhart]

According to some of this morning's newspapers, a great Holbein portrait is to be sold at Christie's on 15 April, along with a fine Canaletto and an equally fine Rembrandt. The pictures have been in historic houses for centuries—or, at least, for decades—but, as we know, pictures in such houses are coming on to the market in great quantities because of the current financial pressures: estate duty, taxes, inflation and falling farm incomes.

Mr. Fisher: Will the hon. Gentleman join me in expressing some disquiet about the fact that the owner of the pictures that he mentioned did not see fit even to discuss with any of the major galleries—the national gallery, for instance—the possibility of a private treaty sale? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it will be very sad if that becomes the norm? So far, what has distinguished the responsible behaviour of the great private owners from the behaviour of others is the fact that, when they have needed to dispose of works of art, they have first tried to negotiate a sale with national galleries. I hope that this unhappy precedent will not be followed.

Sir Philip Goodhart: I entirely agree. The practice of trying to negotiate with the great national galleries is wholly desirable. I do not know whether the owners of the three paintings that I mentioned have followed that procedure—I have seen no statement from them—but we are clearly faced with a continuing problem in regard to the availability of works which would be an important addition to the national collections. Even with the most generous financial provision and the most successful national lottery, there will still be financial shortfalls.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) was slightly critical of the new arrangements whereby the national gallery acquired two great pictures on the basis of instalment payments. It strikes me as quite sensible to adopt flexible financial arrangements for the acquisition of new pictures.

In the case of disposal, too, there is room for increased flexibility. I should like to see in clause 4 a provision enabling the national gallery, the Tate and the national portrait gallery to lease some of their pictures. Leasehold is an accepted practice in the property market, and I do not see why it should not become, to a certain extent, a practice in the art world as well. The Getty museum has enormous purchasing power. Why should not some of the national gallery's pictures that are not of prime importance and some of the Tate pictures that are not, and cannot be, on display be leased for a period of five, 10 or even 25 years to people who are anxious to acquire them? That could bring some new money in and allow the national gallery and the Tate to increase their powers of acquisition.

In a letter to *The Independent*, published today, the Minister, referring to the whole question of acquisition by the national collections and the export of works of art, says:

> "My prime concern . . . is to see that important treasures from our heritage, passed on in the past from one generation to another, remain as far as possible in this country for the educational enjoyment of the millions of Britons who visit museums, galleries and historic houses."

That is a very laudable objective, which we should all support, but I do not believe that the rigidity of clause 4 will help the Minister to achieve it.

6.42 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): It is a pleasure for me to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), who has contributed a number of original ideas on the subject of acquisition.

Clause 4 is a modest but worthwhile step in the right direction. The whole point of a work of art is that it should be enjoyed and perceived. It is utterly useless when locked up and stashed away in a cellar. A large proportion of the great museums to which the Bill refers keep a considerable number of their works of art below ground, or otherwise hidden from view, because there is no room to display them. Museums aim to increase their stock of works of art almost as an end in itself. That is wrong. We should move towards a situation in which it is considered quite normal for a museum either to lease works of art, as has been suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham, or even, in certain circumstances, to sell works for the purpose of financing other acquisitions.

I take the point that people making bequests want those things to remain in the museums, but it is open to those people to make such a stipulation in, say, a solicitor's letter or by some other means. In the case of some past acquisitions, those considerations do not necessarily apply and I do not see anything intrinsically wrong with a vastly overstocked museum selling 50 unwanted items to enable it to make one valuable and enormously desirable acquisition—something that it and its visitors would cherish and would very much want to see on display. I would rather have a work of art in a private house, where comparatively few people would see it, than have it locked away in the dark under a museum, where no one would see it.

I hope that we shall be able to move further in the direction indicated by clause 4 and that finance for acquisitions will be provided through a national lottery. This idea should have the support of the whole House. It certainly has the support of the vast majority of the members of my party. I was very pleased by the Minister's response to my intervention concerning the support that this concept has received from his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce), and many other Conservative Members. A national lottery could produce large sums of money for museum buildings. It would create additional money, and certainly ought not to detract from what is already provided. We should have three sources of public support for the arts: support through existing grants, which, with the very impressive record of the Government, has increased by 30 per cent. in real terms; support resulting from the enormous growth in business sponsorship, which has been wholly beneficial and ought not to be disparaged in any way; and support in the future, I hope, through a national lottery.

The Government's record in the arts is absolutely first class, and I believe that the country will support it in the next few weeks.

6.45 pm

Mr. Fisher: This being a Bill which has general support from all corners of the House, we have had a wide-ranging and stimulating debate. In the context of a very sharp disagreement about the value of the Government's policy, there has been a surprising—refreshing, some might say —degree of cross-party support for a number of key points. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Dudley, West (Dr. Blackburn) and the hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) agree with us about the question of charging. The hon. Member for Beckenham's detailed knowledge of the Turner bequest enlightened everybody and demonstrated that his daily visits to the Tate have been put to very good use indeed.

There is total cross-party regret at the fact that the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce) may have made his last House of Commons speech on the arts. Members on both sides have paid him very deserved compliments for his parliamentary defence of the arts. He paid a very generous, but very correct, tribute to the people in the arts world—the administrators, the artists, the designers and the writers—who bring such distinction to this country and such enrichment to our communities and ourselves. I expect that our tribute will be echoed by those people, who know that during the right hon. Gentleman's five years they had a Minister who, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, struggled valiantly against the then Prime Minister's hostility. He deflected much of the pain from the arts world. Few holders of his office will be remembered with so much affection in that world, even if the people in it did not always agree with the right hon. Gentleman's judgment and his ability to dispense money. There was cross-party support for his remarks tonight.

There is also cross-party support for the fact that the Minister has dropped the indemnity clause. In this regard, however, there are still some areas of disagreement. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said, it will be very important to see what replaces that clause. Let us hope that the Minister will avoid the need for another withdrawal. This time he should consult closely the galleries and museums concerned, and he should do so quickly, as hon. Members wish to proceed to the Committee stage and will want a reasonable period to consider the Government's suggested replacement. If the Minister has to balance the two, I hope that he will consult widely and carefully so that this time he gets it right.

There was also disagreement, to which we shall return in Committee, about gifts. In his very well argued and well-researched speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central laid particular emphasis on the contribution that people such as Sir Denis Mahon have made to the arts world and their enormous generosity as benefactors. My hon. Friend rightly fears that that generosity could be inhibited. The Minister should reconsider his advice. He thinks that the answer to the problem is for potential benefactors to consult their lawyer and enter into trust deeds to protect their gifts.

If the Minister had stopped for a moment to consider the implications of his remarks, he would have realised that what he was saying to them was, "In order to protect yourself against this Act of Parliament, you should take legal advice and enter into expensive legal trust deeds." It is nonsense for the Minister to recommend people to take legal advice to protect themselves against possible future eventualities. However, we shall return in Committee to the question of gifts. I hope that by then the Minister will also have had a chance to think again about the time that people should serve as trustees.

The Minister knows that when the Bill is considered in Committee he will have to explain what exactly is the difference, in his view, between the national gallery, which he believes should not have powers of disposal, and the Tate gallery and the national portrait gallery. The Minister has had an easy ride today, but he knows that he faces a difficult job in Committee. He has given in to very persuasive advocacy by one gallery but not to the pleas that were made on behalf of the others. He has not treated them in an even-handed way. He may, however, explain that in his closing remarks.

In general, there is widespread support for these measures. We welcome them, as well as the right hon. Gentleman's role in their birth. He was very modest about his own contribution and paid tribute to the previous Minister for getting the Bill on the Floor of the House. The House knows, however, that we owe something to him for it. Although there is cross-party support for the Bill, the wider picture will continue to be fiercely argued and disputed on the Opposition side. I believe that we speak for most of the museums world and arts world. The Government's record over the last 12 years is a disgrace. *[Interruption.]* We need not argue about it any longer. The public will decide in a few weeks. I believe that they will agree with the Opposition that, although the Bill is a useful measure, the most useful thing that this Government could do would be to go and to leave the arts to a Government who care about them and are prepared to make a commitment to them.

6.52 pm

Mr. Renton: It is a pleasant change for me to be able to agree for once with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) in the generous tribute that he paid to my very distinguished predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Sir R. Luce). My right hon. Friend has been my neighbour in West Sussex for many years and he is a personal friend. One of the great pleasures of taking on the arts job was to know that I was continuing down a path where he had set a very clear and fine record. I have always appreciated his advice and wisdom.

If this is to be the last occasion on which my right hon. Friend speaks on an arts subject in the House of Commons, all of us will be pleased that his connection with the arts is to continue, both as president of the Compass theatre—that well-known and successful touring company—and as president of the voluntary arts network. It will be a great pleasure to us all, therefore, that in one guise or another we shall continue to be reminded by my right hon. Friend of the proper way to do things in the arts world. I am glad that he has been here today. He was the progenitor of the Bill. I am pleased that at last we have found legislative time for it. I thank the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central for his help today on Second Reading. I am sure that he will continue to support the Bill in Committee.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham referred to the encouragement of travelling exhibitions. I can assure him that we continue to encourage the national museums and galleries to ensure that their holdings are as widely seen as possible throughout Britain. That is being encouraged in a number of ways, most particularly at outstations, as they are called—for example, the Tate of the north in Liverpool and, in future, the Tate of the west

[Mr. Renton]

in St. Ives. The Tate of the north in Liverpool is holding a major exhibition of the paintings of Lucian Freud, many of which come from the Tate's own collection.

We also encourage the national museums and galleries to make major contributions to exhibitions in other local museums and galleries. The most recent example is the exhibition of design from the 1950s at Manchester, which I had the opportunity to see, many of the items for which were lent by the V and A. Above all, help is channelled all the time through the Museums and Galleries Commission and the area museums councils. As long as I have this ministerial job, I am determined to continue to encourage increased access to central national collections by means of exhibitions in local museums and galleries.

All of us will have been moved by the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Dr. Blackburn) and by the eloquence with which he spoke of the beauty and importance of the arts. The curator of Dudley art gallery will be amazed and delighted to find that my hon. Friend's telephone call to him today and the fact that he is to exhibit a Turner in his gallery next Monday has been commented on in the House of Commons this afternoon and that for ever it will find a place in *Hansard*. As he spoke, I was reminded of Turner's own words. His customary remark, following the sale of one of his paintings, was, "I've lost one of my children this week." I feel that that is a remark with which my hon. Friend can very much associate himself. Only yesterday evening I was at the Tate looking at the exhibition of Turner's works, "The Fourth Decade", in the Clore gallery, thanks very much to the sponsorship of Agfa. The exhibition contains some very delightful and interesting watercolours. I know that the members of the Clore family, particularly Sir Charles Clore's extremely generous daughter, Vivien Duffield, will have been very pleased to hear my hon. Friend's remarks about the Clore gallery.

As to the extremely interesting comments of another very old friend of mine, my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), I thank him for his support for flexibility in both the disposal and acquisition arrangements. I agree with him. I suspect that we shall have to look at this question very carefully over the years. I was interested in what he said about clause 4 and the advantages of leasing. There are difficulties about leasing. It is labour intensive. It requires additional staff. That would need to be funded and the leasing arrangements would have to be closely monitored. I suspect that it would be better to look in more detail at the concept of outstations, to which I referred in my reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham.

As to my hon. Friend's point about the RAMC site, I am aware of his close interest in the site and of his correspondence with Mr. Nicholas Serota. I understand that there are no immediate plans to dispose of that site, but my office is in touch with the Ministry of Defence about a possible use for the site, should disposal of it ever be considered.

The interest in the arts of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) is well known to hon. Members. He is probably the best pianist in the House. He has been a strong and good chairman of our Back-Bench committee for some time. I was pleased to receive his support for clause 4, the key clause. I know that he supports a national lottery as a potentially very useful source of money for the arts, in particular for the funding of capital projects. I see that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central is pointing to his hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling). I have nothing to add to what I have already said to him. I have made my position absolutely clear. If he wishes to raise the matter in Committee he will be able to do so.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central emphasised that the office of trustee should be held for seven years, not five. I regard that as very much a Committee point. I think that five years is about right. It works for both sides and it is not out of the way for someone who has served for five years to be reappointed for another five years. It is not a point of great substance, but we can return to it in Committee.

I have greater difficulty on the issue of purchase grants. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central knows the arts world well enough to know that purchase is by no means the only way in which our great national galleries have been acquiring pictures in recent years. They have been helped by personal gifts and by the national heritage memorial fund, for which we have recently increased the funds available from £3 million to £12 million. They are helped by objects of art that come to them through acceptance in lieu. Since 1980, the national gallery, the Tate gallery and the national portrait gallery have acquired, through acceptance in lieu—it has nothing to do with their purchase grant—pictures with a market value of nearly £24 million. The price paid was just under £12 million.

Any gallery director would like his purchase grant to be increased. He would be crazy if he did not. It is his job to say that he would like more money from the Government, the local authority or the sponsor. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central knows that there are many other routes that the great galleries and museums have successfully used in recent years in order to acquire pictures, sculptures and other works of art.

As my hon. Friends have stressed throughout this short but interesting debate, our record of funding the arts has been enormously positive, not just our funding for the Arts Council, but in the very much larger sums of money that we are making available—for example, for the building and refurbishment projects in the national museums and galleries. We are making available £196 million over the next three years, more than £60 million a year. That is much larger than the figure five or six years ago. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central should give us credit for that, but he finds it difficult to accept that there is any good in the extremely positive record of the Conservative Government. What are his alternatives? By and large, the Labour party would kill off the sponsorship goose, which is increasingly laying a larger and larger golden egg. That would be £40 million gone. The Labour party's policy on charging would make museums poorer and would interfere in their activities. That would be another £40 million gone. We have a fine arts record. By contrast, the Labour party has a purely destructive and negative record without any new ideas.

This is probably the last aria of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central before the final curtain falls. I remind him of the beautiful but sad words from "Macbeth":

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more".

As he struts no more, the hon. Gentleman can take comfort from the fact that a new dinosaur gallery is opening in the natural history museum in April. I have no doubt that he will find himself one of the earliest acquisitions in that gallery.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Museums and Galleries Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required by a Minister of the Crown for making payments under or by virtue of the Act;
(b) any administrative expenses of a Minister of the Crown which are attributable to the Act; and
(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under or by virtue of any other enactment out of money so provided.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Social Security Administration Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

7.3 pm

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is the first of six Bills relating to social security that are before the House this evening. They all relate to the consolidation of statutes relating to the state system of social security, so I shall, with permission, speak to all six together.

These Bills between them represent the first consolidation of all the United Kingdom statute law on social security. The first three relate to Great Britain. The other three contain corresponding provisions for Northern Ireland.

The Social Security Administration Bill is concerned, as its name implies, with the administration of the social security system. It deals with matters such as the payments of benefits, adjudication, enforcement and uprating.

The Social Security Contributions and Benefits Bill deals with the contributions on which certain social security benefits depend, and also with the various benefits themselves. It covers a wide range of benefits from unemployment and sickness to child benefit and the Christmas bonus to pensioners.

The Social Security (Consequential Provisions) Bill contains repeals and consequential and transitional provisions arising out of the other two Bills.

As I have said, the other three Bills relate to Northern Ireland and have the same purpose as their Great Britain counterparts. They are the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Bill, the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Bill and the Social Security (Consequential Provision) (Northern Ireland) Bill.

In preparing the three Great Britain Bills, the Law Commission and the Scottish Law Commission have, in accordance with normal practice, issued a report on the consolidation in which they make a number of recommendations for minor amendments that are necessary in order to produce a satisfactory consolidation. For the Northern Ireland Bills, the Lord Chancellor laid before Parliament in November last year a memorandum containing a number of corrections and minor amendments that were needed in order to facilitate the consolidation. That was in accordance with the Consolidation of Enactments (Procedure) Act 1949.

All six Bills were referred in the usual way to the Joint Committee on Consolidation Bills during their passage in another place. The Joint Committee has since reported, on 11 December 1991, its approval of the minor amendments and corrections referred to in the report of the Law Commissions and in the Lord Chancellor's memorandum.

I believe that the House will wish to join me in congratulating the respective Law Commissions and draftsmen, here and in Northern Ireland, on their prodigious industry in bringing this project to fruition. The work involved has been enormous, and will be greatly appreciated by those who have regular recourse to this area of the statute book, especially those who advise clients about their right to claim benefits.

7.6 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I start where the Attorney-General finished, by congratulating the Law Commissions and the parliamentary draftsmen on their work on this and the other Bills in the series. I shall also speak to all six Bills together, as I hope that it will shorten our proceedings.

The legislation is important, but a glance at one of the Bills will show that it is also complex and technical. However, it is law that is mainly for laymen, not lawyers. Consolidation means that those who need to look for this branch of law need search in only one jungle instead of several, as they have to do now. Therefore, as always, I welcome consolidation.

Welcome for the Bill and support for the measure, which is being prepared under the aegis of the Law Commission, do not excuse the Government's lamentable and pathetic record on implementing the work of the Law Commission. The Attorney-General spoke of the enormous use of resources in bringing together a vast number of statutes into six related consolidation measures. I wonder whether that acts to the detriment of other law reform.

We have a report from the Law Commission on the table. However, since 1984, only 11 of 33 reports have been implemented. Of 12 reports in 1988 and 1989, only two have been implemented. There is a whole series of law reports, which I would not be allowed to refer to in detail, but which includes measures on international fraud, corroboration of evidence, the wholly unjust liability of original lessees, a Bill to facilitate the use of the Welsh language in conveyancing and the rights of widows on intestacy, on which nothing has been done.

Although the Government have drafted this Bill, their record on the other law reforms that flow from the work of the Law Commission has been a disgrace. Our praise for this Bill should not obscure our condemnation of what we regard as the Government's slothful and neglectful reaction to most of the work of the Law Commission.

7.9 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I also welcome the consolidation because the flow of legislation—primary and subordinate—from this Government in particular and from previous Governments in general has been massive, as the Attorney-General knows. I am Chairman of the Joint Committee on delegated legislation, which frequently asks the Department for consolidation of subordinate legislation, so it is pleasing that primary legislation has been subjected to the same process.

I want to deal especially with the measures which affect England, Wales and Scotland. Consolidation is especially important because there is an intricate web for applicants. We should never forget that it is difficult for applicants to find their way through the social security network to get the payments which are necessary for people in a very poor and often vulnerable position.

The consolidation will not provide an easy guide but it will help to provide a helpful, consolidated and largely single source of help and guidance for those who become expert in it in the advice centres which are available to many people. We hope that the consolidation will be used to provide an authoritative guide, and I hope for two things.

First, as the legislation will be used by many people who in turn give help and advice to perhaps hundreds or thousands of people who visit advice centres, the price must be kept as low as possible. The price has rocketed under this Government, to the point at which it is prohibitive even for some public institutions. This is not the Attorney-General's responsibility, but I urge him to recommend to the Department of Social Security that it keeps the price within a practicable limit to help organisations.

Secondly, it might be helpful if copies were available at each social security office. It is true that many people would not be able to fathom the legislation because it is complex, but it would be helpful if a reference copy were available to those who were interested. As we make the legislation, and as this consolidation has been designed to remove the difficulties of examining disparate documents by, in this instance, putting them into three Acts of Parliament, surely we should encourage people to read the Acts and to use them as sources.

To do that, we must make them available, but unfortunately, for the most part, copies of legislation or Acts of Parliament are too expensive for the ordinary person to obtain. Of course, they are too expensive for the applicant for social security to obtain.

Many local authorities are now so short of money that, whereas at one time they might have bought these reference documents as a matter of course, they are seeking documents that they can drop from their list and, in the case of a reference library, this legislation might be one of those documents. That is a misfortune and the Government should at least try to assist people in the provision of this information.

Having made those qualified remarks, I always welcome consolidation. If we send out a great deal of confused and patchy legislation, that is a failure on our part which makes it hardly surprising that citizens fail to comprehend it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

SOCIAL SECURITY CONTRIBUTIONS AND BENEFITS BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

SOCIAL SECURITY (CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISIONS) BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Boswell].*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Boswell].*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

SOCIAL SECURITY CONTRIBUTIONS AND BENEFITS (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Boswell].*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

SOCIAL SECURITY (CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISIONS) (NORTHERN IRELAND) BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House. —*[Mr. Boswell].*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 58 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Local Government Finance (Wales)

7.22 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): I beg to move,

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1992-93 (Revised) (House of Commons Paper No. 247), a copy of which was laid before this House on 10 February, be approved.

I understand that it will be convenient for us also to discuss the next two motions:

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 4) (House of Commons Paper No. 241), a copy of which was laid before this House on 10 February, be approved.

That the Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (No. 3) (House of Commons Paper No. 153), a copy of which was laid before this House on 20 January, be approved.

The reports before the House contain my decisions on the local government revenue settlement for 1992-93. Since my statement to the House on 13 January the Government have announced that they are recommending acceptance of the teachers review body report on pay and providing additional resources to help local education authorities meet the cost of the pay award. Last summer, in considering the local authority settlement for 1992-93, the likely pay bill for teachers was one of the matters that I took into account. In the event, the pay settlement, which will add 7·8 per cent. to the pay bill of education authorities, was somewhat higher than I had allowed for. I have therefore provided an additional £3·5 million in revenue support grant to bridge the gap. I believe that this underlines our commitment to ensuring that the dedication and achievements of our teachers are properly rewarded.

The additional resources are included in the revised revenue support grant and distribution reports before the House tonight. The original RSG and distribution reports, which were laid on 20 January, have been withdrawn.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) *rose*——

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend) *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), and then to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths).

Mr. Rowlands: I am sorry to intervene so early, but the Secretary of State has gone straight into the question of funding the pay award. Is there any truth in the rumour that he intends to redistribute the grant in part from the district authorities to the county authorities, in order to cover some of the costs of the settlement?

Mr. Hunt: The reports are all clearly before the House. I have no proposals to change the figures in them.

Mr. Rowlands: I asked a specific question.

Mr. Hunt: No, there is no truth in the rumour. I said no. The figures are set out in the reports, and they are clearly before the House tonight.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Calculations were made for the education budget for the coming financial year when the original document was laid before the House last summer, and the Secretary of State is now talking about an underestimate. Will he tell the House how much local

[Mr. Win Griffiths]

education authorities will have to draw from their own resources to cover the extra amount that will not be covered by the additional grant that the right hon. Gentleman has announced?

Mr. Hunt: As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, we cannot hypothecate the standard spending assessment. As part of local authorities, local education authorities receive an overall SSA. For Welsh counties the SSA increased on average by 8·1 per cent. That is well ahead of inflation, and —given the scope for efficiency savings over the range of services that counties provide—it represents a substantial sum. However, I realise that the recommended award is higher than I had expected, and I have therefore provided additional money to take account of that.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I touched upon the matter that I am about to raise earlier today, in the Welsh Grand Committee, but there was no chance to follow it up. My local county council, Gwynedd, told me today that the 7·5 per cent. increase will not only affect teachers' salaries, but will have a knock-on effect on several salary bands and expenses. There will be a shortfall of £500,000 in the budget, even after allowing for the proportion of the £3·5 million that will come to Gwynedd. If that is the case, can the Secretary of State give an assurance that, if it is necessary to increase the poll tax in order to raise that money, Gwynedd will not be capped for doing so— regrettable though the increase may be?

Mr. Hunt: The amount allowed for Gwynedd in the standard spending assessment settlement is increased by £9·5 million—6 per cent. That is a reasonable increase, bearing in mind all the demands. Gwynedd will also receive a share of the additional money that I have provided. The hon. Gentleman asked about capping—I should like to return to that subject in a few moments.

There should be no need to resort to unjustified cuts in numbers of teachers or in any other elements of the education service—or to increase community charges. I believe that all the points that have been raised have been allowed for in the settlement I announced.

It might be helpful if I summarised the main features of the settlement. Total standard spending for 1992-93 is £2,608 million—that is equivalent to £1,195 per charge payer in Wales. That is an increase of 8·7 per cent. over the comparable TSS figure for 1991-92 and it is well over one percentage point more than the equivalent increase for English local authorities. The aggregate external finance, which now encompasses the community charge grant, for 1992-93 now stands at £2,352 million. If one takes the equivalent figure for 1991-92, it represents an increase of 6·9 per cent. That means that charge payers should expect to contribute less than 10 per cent. to the cost of local government services in Wales.

I am making available £40 million under the community charge reduction scheme. If one also takes into account the community charge benefit, the contribution from Welsh charge payers will fall to around 7 per cent. That means that 93 per cent. of the cost of local government services will be provided from central Government resources.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West) *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: I shall give way after I have finished this point about the key figure. If authorities spend in line with TSS, it will mean an average community charge payment in Wales of about £85.

Mr. Morgan: I am absolutely astonished at the right hon. Gentleman's words. He said 93 per cent. of the costs will be met from central Government resources. He seems to assume that the uniform business rate, having been collected from local industry and dispatched to central Government, becomes the gift of central Government to give back to the local authorities. Those authorities used to collect it separately anyway. Surely he realises that that money is not equivalent to a Government grant, but represents local business taxes.

Mr. Hunt: As a result of legislation passed in the House, the non-domestic business rate is redistributed nationally by the Government. The Government do not have some special money that they produce at the Royal Mint. The Government are always redistributing resources whether they come from income tax, value added tax, the uniform business rate or whatever. I do not see the point of the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Let me break down the figures. Within the aggregate external finance package, the revenue support grant total for 1992-93 is £1,621 million. The total allocated for revenue specific grants is £195 million and the distributable amount from the non-domestic rating account is £536 million. The Welsh non-domestic rate poundage for 1992-93 will increase by more than 4 per cent. to 42·5.

The distribution report before the House sets out the calculations for each authority's standard spending assessment. Those have been recalculated to take account of the increase in resources for teachers' pay. However, to achieve consistency, it has also been necessary for me to take account of other data changes. They include a number of credit approvals for capital spending which affect the loan charges element of individual authorities' SSAs. All the changes have been handled in accordance with the distribution formulae agreed with the local authority associations. The overall average increase in SSAs for the coming financial year is more than 8 per cent. after making allowance for the higher education institutions that are to leave the local authority sector on 1 April 1992. The average increase for counties is 8·1 per cent. and for districts 8·7 per cent.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Secretary of State now appears to count it as a virtue that 93 per cent. of local authority expenditure will be met from central Government and 7 per cent. only from the local poll tax. Is my memory correct, because I recall that, when the Secretary of State and his colleagues were trying to sell the poll tax, one of its chief virtues was meant to be the accountability of local government to its local poll tax payers? In the light of the 7 per cent. contribution from those people, where does the accountability argument now stand?

Mr. Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman thought about it, he would understand that the figures sharpen accountability —*[Interruption.]* Of course they do. The hon. Gentleman's inference is much more serious because I have been searching for some considerable time for a suggestion from the Opposition as to whether they would maintain Wales's grant advantage. The hon. Member for

Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said that he felt that about the right amount to be raised from local taxation was 20 per cent.

Mr. Anderson: What about accountability?

Mr. Hunt: I am not talking about accountability at the moment; I am talking about the real bill for Welsh people.

In Committee today I tried to allow the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) to intervene so that I could obtain that information. He did not do so, so we still have the question about what would happen to the Welsh grant advantage. If we had the tragedy of a Labour Government returned to office and if they allowed for local people to raise 20 per cent. of the contribution towards local expenditure, local bills for local people in Wales would treble. That is why the Opposition owe us an answer on that crucial point. I hope that we will hear it tonight.

I am firmly of the view that the levels of increase will enable local authorities to maintain and develop services without placing an unreasonable burden on charge payers. They are significantly in excess of inflation and, based on conclusions reached by the Audit Commission, I believe that there are also substantial efficiency savings available to local authorities. As I told the House on 13 January, I plan to meet the Welsh local authority associations shortly to discuss their future plans for efficiency initiatives. They have achieved much already, but I think that they would acknowledge that there is still much that can be accomplished.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): The right hon. Gentleman said that SSA settlements were in excess of inflation, but the SSA for Powys is just 6·2 per cent. even when allowance is made for the teachers' salary increases. Why is it that the mathematical analysis that has produced that SSA discriminates against the charge payers of Powys, who have set their poll tax at £100, right on the right hon. Gentleman's target?

Mr. Hunt: I am always concerned for the hon. Gentleman when he produces wrong figures, so may I put the record straight?

In Powys the SSA rises from £87·670 million to £93·187 million. That is an increase of £5·517 million, which is equivalent to a 6·3 per cent. addition. Compared with the 1991-92 budget in Powys, that SSA is 8 per cent. higher. It is the highest increase on last year's budgets of any of the counties in Wales.

If one assesses that SSA per head—I realise that I may be causing dissension elsewhere in the House—which county of all the Welsh counties receives the largest SSA per head? The answer is Powys. It receives £1,019 per head.

Mr. Livsey: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, Powys is by far the most sparsely populated county in Wales. What has happened now is that the relativity between Powys and the other county councils has reduced.

Mr. Hunt: Let me give the hon. Gentleman the exact figures. I do not want this to turn into a debate about Powys, but it is important for the people of Powys to know the facts. Aggregate external finance in Powys will rise from £70 million to £84 million. Therefore, the external finance towards a budget of £93 million will be £84 million. Working out the increase in SSA per head, one sees that Powys receives the largest increase over 1991-92 for the year 1992-93. The increase in Powys is larger than in any other county in Wales and amounts to £70 per head. Therefore, I hope that we have heard the last of that, but if there is any dispute over the figures the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) will no doubt come back to me.

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): Would my right hon. Friend care to estimate what might happen to community charge payers in Powys if the Liberal Democrats' policy were implemented? The paper "Shaping Tomorrow's Local Democracy" says that the Liberal Democrats propose a cut in revenue support from central Government. It says:

> "as soon as practicable the proportion of the total tax revenue which is raised at local, as opposed to national, level . . . must be very substantially increased".

Mr. Hunt: I should be delighted to hear what the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor has to say about that because it would be bad news for Powys if the Liberals got anywhere near control. They have already said that local councils should raise far more of the money that they spend. They want increased accountability but they would increase the bill of people in Powys.

Taking into account the proposed increases for 1992-93, the average increase in Welsh districts' SSAs for 1991-92 and 1992-93 taken together is more than 30 per cent. That is an increase in SSA over only two years. The average increase for Welsh counties, after making allowance for the changes in higher education, is 24 per cent. over two years. Those are significant increases and they confound any argument that the Government are not committed to the adequate resourcing of local government in Wales.

I am aware of complaints that the standard spending assessments system does not properly reflect the needs of individual authorities and gives rise to volatile changes in individual authorities' SSAs year on year. The methodology for determining SSAs for 1992-93 has, as in years past, been agreed with the associations through the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. It is time-consuming and often contentious work and I pay tribute to the associations for their efforts in achieving fully agreed conclusions.

The starting point for those discussions is that change should be limited to what is essential. I am in full agreement with the local authority associations that stability should be preserved unless there is a good reason for change. An important change to the district authority formulae for 1992-93, which the Council of Welsh Districts considered essential, has been the reduction in the distributive effect of the composite social indicator to 4 per cent. of the overall current SSA for district authorities. The composite social indicator—CSI—was included in the formulae for the 1990-91 settlement at the request of the CWD, with the intention of redistributing funds to those district authorities that suffer relative social deprivation. The CWD now considers that the CSI mechanism over-compensates those authorities, and so the Welsh Consultative Council agreed to the CWD's request for a change in 1992-93. I hope that that explains the background to the system.

SSAs should also reflect the changing circumstances of individual authorities. To that end, the distribution model uses financial and non-financial data supplied by local authorities. That includes population changes and the

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level of individual authorities' borrowing that affect loan charges. For those reasons and others, the position of local authorities relative to one another inevitably changes year on year.

I believe that the SSA arrangements are sound and that there are good reasons for the changes which affect individual authorities' SSAs.

Mr. Morgan: Some Opposition Members are not quite as bright as the Secretary of State. At least, we are not quite as well briefed on the intricacies of how those measurements are arrived at. Hon. Members on both sides of the House and probably leaders of the local authorities and their officers would like to eliminate much of the unnecessary quarrelling over the exact definitions of the allowance to be made for inflation. Has the Secretary of State managed to agree with the local authorities, or even just with their treasurers, what the proper rate of increase should be in the coming year for what could be called a "service standstill" budget? That would take into account all the extra costs that local authorities face, because it is a much more labour-intensive service than the average basket of goods. The retail prices index of inflation is irrelevant. What is the rate of increase that local authorities and the Minister's specialists agree is required to maintain services at the same level next year?

Mr. Hunt: That is precisely what is discussed at the Welsh Consultative Council for Local Government Finance. In all my experience as a Minister responsible for local government finance in England, I never knew a local authority publicly to say, "Thank you very much, we do not want any more". I remember a Labour Minister telling local authorities that the party was over. There has always been a conflict between central Government and local government about the appropriate level of spending, but in Wales we have a particularly effective mechanism. We sit round a table and argue the points through, which is the function of the Welsh Consultative Council for Local Government Finance. I pay tribute to the local government officials and leaders—*[Interruption.]* We do not agree a figure. I put what I believe to be the appropriate level of spending in the TSS——

Mr. Morgan: Is that a bank or a building society?

Mr. Hunt: It is neither a bank nor a building society. It means total standard spending and is the sum total of all the standard spending assessments in Wales. That is the key figure, which I believe has been increased appropriately.

I hope soon to submit for the approval of the House, a special grant report setting out arrangements for the payment of an additional £6 million that I am providing to fund 75 per cent. of the estimated revenue cost of council tax implementation. It would be inappropriate for the report to be laid before Parliament until it has given its consent to the Local Government Finance Bill. Standard spending assessments under the settlement for 1992-93 do, however, make provision for the 25 per cent. of that expected expenditure, which is not met and will not be covered by the special grant.

I announced on 13 January that I shall provide £40 million under the community charge reduction scheme for 1992-93. In deciding on the appropriate level of funding for the coming year, I have taken account of both the significant reduction in community charge levels that has been achieved through community charge grant for 1991-92, and the increased level of revenue support grant that I am providing for 1992-93. About 56 per cent. of charge payers in 500 communities will continue to receive community charge relief. The amount that I am committing to the scheme is double that provided in 1990-91, when the community charge for standard spending was £55 higher than the level that I consider appropriate for 1992-93.

Provided that local authorities spend in line with my plans, the personal community charge that they set should not exceed, on average, £118. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may be only just beginning to understand what I am saying. The important issue is the increase in TSS, which is the appropriate increase in all the circumstances. That £118 is less than half the equivalent figure for English authorities and £3 less than the average charge of £121 set by Welsh authorities for 1991-92. Relief under the community charge reduction scheme for the coming year should reduce the average community charge in Wales to £100. When account is taken of community charge benefit, the average charge falls further to about £85.

Mr. Anderson: The Secretary of State will recall that the Prime Minister called the poll tax "uncollectable". On what assumptions is the Secretary of State working in respect of the proportion of the total sum capable of being collected by Welsh authorities, given that there is ever greater public resistance to it? Perhaps "resistance" is the wrong word, but it is more difficult for local authorities to collect that tax. Is the assumed figure—94 per cent.—more or less.

Mr. Hunt: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has raised that point, as I have the latest figures, which show that community charge collection in Wales is going well. Returns up to and including the third quarter of 1991-92 show that a total of 70 per cent. of the budgeted income for the year had been collected by 31 December. That includes four authorities that have collected 85 per cent. or more of their budgeted income—Dinefwr, Preseli, Ogwr and Brecknock. I hope that the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) appreciates that that is the quickest response that he has received to any question that he has asked in the House. Authorities expect to collect 100 per cent. of the budgeted total for 1990-91, and they are on course to achieve the same level of collection in 1991-92.

The hon. Gentleman asked for the exact figures for the full amount as against the budgeted amount. The latest figures for the end of the third quarter of 1991—to 31 December 1991—show that 69·8 per cent. of the budgeted amount and 65·5 per cent. of the full amount has been collected. That is a remarkably good record when compared with anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Anderson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hunt: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will get a chance to make his own contribution.

I wish to pay tribute to staff, councillors and everyone working in local authorities in Wales who have achieved such a remarkably good result.

Some Members opposite have been telling people not to pay the community charge—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] I cannot see any in the Chamber. There are no such Members in the Chamber, but there have been Members on Opposition Benches— —

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): The Secretary of State said "opposite".

Mr. Hunt: I said that there had been Members on Opposition Benches—I chose my words carefully—who have advocated the non-payment of poll tax or community charge. I can identify more than 30 Labour Members who told the people of the United Kingdom not to pay their poll tax or community charge.

I wish to say a few words about non-payment. There will be no amnesty for non-payers. We are taking further steps to ensure that authorities have the necessary powers for the proper enforcement of the community charge. We have extended from two to six years the period during which enforcement proceedings may be commenced. We are moving to put beyond doubt the admissibility of computer evidence in proceedings for community charge recovery in magistrates courts. My Department has written to local authorities about how to proceed in the short period before the Local Government Finance Bill is enacted.

We believe there is no obstacle to authorities continuing to apply for liability orders where they consider that their procedures for the presentation of cases meet the requirements of existing law. I understand that authorities are continuing to apply and that more than 6,000 liability orders were made by Welsh magistrates in the last two weeks of January.

The settlement before the House today is a good one for local government and charge payers alike.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hunt: I shall not give way yet as I wish to address the point on capping raised by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley).

As the House knows, I have not announced charge capping criteria for 1992-93, but I will scrutinise carefully the budget of any authority which exceeds its SSA. I hope that it will not be necessary for me to use my charge-capping powers. In recent years, Welsh authorities have, on the whole, performed better than their English counterparts in setting prudent budgets. They have benefited from more generous settlements than their English counterparts in recognition of this, and it has not been necessary to charge cap a single Welsh local authority. That is a record which I want to continue, but I have become increasingly concerned during the past few days and weeks by reports I have seen in newspapers, which I hope are untrue, which suggest that a number of authorities are considering setting budgets that would place an unacceptable burden on charge payers. Those authorities should be in no doubt that I shall use my charge-capping powers if I consider it necessary. In view of those reports, I have today asked my officials to set up a special unit in the Welsh Office to make the necessary arrangements for capping. I hope any authorities that are contemplating diverging from my plans in setting budgets will think again and that I will not have to activate the capping procedures now in hand.

Dr. Kim Howells: It sounds as though the Secretary of State is setting up a special investigative division. I hope that it will have a better effect on Wales than did the introduction of the poll tax. Local authorities are not abstract notions—their members are elected by respectable, good people in Welsh communities who, through no fault of their own and because they cannot afford to pay the poll tax, have been dragged before the courts and criminalised. They are people who have never previously been in court. The Government are responsible for that and for bringing untold heartache and hardship to households. They should be thoroughly ashamed of that.

Mr. Hunt: I am not ashamed of that. We are talking about civil offences; it is wrong for people to seek to benefit from services while not paying for them. There is no question of people not being able to afford the poll tax or community charge, as the amount provided through the income support system more than covers the 20 per cent. they have to pay, due to the low community charge in Wales.

I believe that the settlement for 1992-93 provides Welsh local authorities with a realistic framework within which to maintain and develop service provision. I hope that they will respond to that challenge and will act in a responsible manner and not undo their past achievements. I commend the settlement to the House.

7.57 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): How obviously Her Majesty's Government have sought to shunt this debate into the small hours. They tried to do so twice and, after nearly three weeks, we are now able to have a debate at a reasonable hour. We know that the Government have sought to hide this debate because they know that the poll tax is most unpopular in Wales. Tonight, the Secretary of State has presented the orders, revised, at only the last minute. That does not increase our confidence in the Government.

The poll tax continues under the Conservatives. They rejected Labour's offer of a poll tax abolition Bill. If our offer had been taken up last summer, another round of poll tax chaos would have been averted. Now, poll tax panic is once again breaking out in the Conservative ranks. The Government will have to fight the general election campaign against a background of renewed controversy over the cost, fairness and practicality of the poll tax. Whether the general election is on 9 April or 7 May, the Conservatives face the spectre of the electorate in Wales picking up their poll tax bills in one hand and Conservative election leaflets in the other.

The Government, who have already wasted more than £100 million on the poll tax in Wales, may yet add confusion to chaos. Will the Secretary of State now rule out any political gerrymandering to delay poll tax bills going out in Wales until after the general election?

The poll tax nightmare continues. Council treasurers are having to try to administer the discredited poll tax which even the Prime Minister described as uncollectable. They also have to collect growing poll tax debts and adjust their budgets to meet standard spending assessments under the threat of poll tax capping. The chaos, confusion and uncertainty among treasurers increase by the day.

Our councils in Wales are being asked to engage in the biggest debt collection exercise in the history of Wales. More than 400,000 summonses for poll tax arrears have been issued by magistrates courts in Wales. Even some of

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the poorest people in Wales still have to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax. Ministers are threatening poll tax capping and, by implication, more cuts in local services.

This wretched record is the responsibility of the Secretary of State, and soon he will have to face the electorate and account for his actions. Conservative Members representing Welsh constituencies—fairly thin on the ground they are too—do not support the right hon. Gentleman's views on the poll tax. They do not believe that it should be inflicted on the people of Wales, and the right hon. Gentleman knows that. But the blame for the chaos lies with him.

The Secretary of State's central role in introducing the poll tax in England and Wales is well known. It is worth reminding the House once again of some of the gems of political wit, insight and intelligence uttered by the right hon. Gentleman in the past. He told the Conservative party conference in 1989:

> "The fact is that, whatever Labour claim or do, the community charge is on course for successful introduction throughout England and Wales."

The right hon. Gentleman recently said:

> "I welcome the community charge system to which I was committed at the last election and to which I remain committed as a much fairer and better system."

So why should we believe anything that the right hon. Gentleman has said tonight? Why should we ever believe him again?

Mr. David Hunt: As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman will put it to the electorate at the next election that we should return to the rating system. When he was Under-Secretary of State for Wales——

Mr. Rowlands: That is going back a bit.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is going back a bit too. He said then:

> "I will go further and call attention to the many anomalies inherent in the rating system."

The hon. Gentleman was against the rating system then, so why is he so much in favour of going back to it now?

Mr. Jones: That was a frivolous intervention, and the right hon. Gentleman knows it.

The Under-Secretary has been no shrinking violet on the poll tax either. The people of Pembroke, reeling under the hon. Gentleman's indifference to the workers of Trecwn and Brawdy, will, I am sure, remember that he said in this House quite recently:

> "The community charge is a fair tax and a reasonable charge to make on people, so we should support it."—[*Official Report*, 23 May 1989; Vol. 153, c. 911.]

Why should the people of Pembroke ever believe him again? We think that this is another nail in his parliamentary coffin.

Mr. Anderson: In the light of that crushing indictment of these two Ministers' record on the poll tax, does my hon. Friend agree that the least the people of Wales can expect from them is some contrition?

Mr. Jones: I am quite prepared to give way to either of them if he wants to apologise for the poll tax. Clearly, there is no contrition tonight.

I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was unconvincing on teachers' pay, particularly when answering questions posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). I understand that the total cost of the teachers' award in Wales will be £49 million. Welsh Office Ministers have claimed that the extra £3·5 million will help to cover the cost of the award, but the counties are left to find the balance of £45·5 million, on top—Ministers did not make this clear—of the built-in additional costs in 1992-93 of funding the 1991 teachers' award, which will cost an extra £14 million—because the 1991 award was phased in and part of it became effective only from December 1991. So the total extra cost to be found by the counties for teachers' pay in the coming year is £63 million, made up of 7·8 per cent. from the 1992 award, and an extra 2·8 per cent. from 1991.

The Secretary of State did not refer to the difficulties that the award will create. Whatever the merits of the teachers' award—we know that the teachers need the money—it is clear that the Government expect the counties of Wales to find ways of meeting exceptional increased costs within a settlement that we know is inadequate for local services as a whole—there is certainly a large hole in the settlement in respect of teachers' pay. On top of all that we have to contend with the right hon. Gentleman's bully-boy tactics of threatening capping.

The blame for next year's bills also lies with the right hon. Gentleman. The local authority associations in Wales consistently advised him that the settlement could be improved. Our spending needs continue to increase. The settlement is inadequate to meet the extra costs flowing from increasing statutory responsibilities. The counties face increasing costs related to the implementation of Government legislation on the national curriculum, on pupil assessment, on community care, and of the Children Act 1989, to say nothing of funding the teachers' pay award.

For districts, the costs of implementing environmental protection legislation and waste disposal legislation are considerable. The right hon. Gentleman did not make his case when discussing the difficulties faced by local authorities.

The Government have no excuses left for the 20 per cent. poll tax contribution rule——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No, not now.

The 20 per cent. rule has been condemned by every independent and professional body. It is to be removed under the council tax, yet the Government insist on keeping it while the poll tax remains. The rule is a disaster and a disgrace, and it is making the poll tax even more difficult to collect. It punishes the poor and it has created debt and hardship. In his passionate intervention earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) spoke the truth.

These orders relate to housing and the Government have created a housing crisis. With over 70,000 people on waiting lists in Wales, homelessness at record levels and mortgage repossessions soaring, it is time for action by the Government, but they have cut the supply of affordable homes to rent. Capital allocations mean that few, if any, council houses will be built next year. In 1975, under the Labour Government, there were 8,294 council house starts. In 1990, the figure was down to just 350. Little wonder that homelessness has doubled in Wales since 1979.

These orders also refer to the attempts by local authorities to generate employment, something that they do very well in Wales. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity finally to come out in support of RECHAR and additionality, which is of such great importance to the south Wales coalfield? It is about time that he chose between party and country and I ask him to stand up and fight for Wales.

This issue threatens to spread beyond the £18 million for the south Wales coalfield. Lack of progress on the additionality issue could threaten European grants and aid worth £18 million to Wales. The blame lies clearly with Her Majesty's Government. This dispute could not be happening at a worse time. Unemployment in Wales increased by 35 per cent. in the last 12 months, yet the Government are blocking millions of pounds for positive local authority initiatives to strengthen the economy, create employment and improve skills. In south Wales alone, not only RECHAR money worth £18 million but over £40 million in regional development funds are at risk. The projects at risk include phase 3 of Cardiff (Wales) Airport business park, the Tawe valley development project in west Glamorgan, the Crumlin navigation regeneration project in Gwent and the valleys innovation centre at Abercynon in Mid-Glamorgan.

This is the record that I honestly believe will put Welsh Ministers at risk when the general election comes. The record of Her Majesty's Government is poor and I was not surprised to see recently an article about the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), the Under-Secretary. The *West Wales Guardian* published an article on its front page headed, "Nick's Seat At Risk". It said:

> "Although . . . the major parties are running neck and neck nationally the regional patterns are not uniform and the swing in Wales forecasts that the Pembroke seat held by Welsh Office Minister Mr. Nicholas Bennett is marginal and will fall to Labour."

This detailed analysis comes not from an impartial newspaper, but from one that favours the Conservatives. I am surprised to see that it is prepared to print the truth and predict that the excellent Labour candidate, Nick Ainger, will win the seat by 2,400 votes.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Jones: I can see that this is enraging the Under-Secretary, but I warn him that though he may come to the Box, he does so at his own peril.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: On the day that that report was published, the Gallup poll in *The Daily Telegraph*—the one on which that newspaper relies—showed a 4·5 per cent. Conservative lead, which gives me a majority of 3,000.

Mr. Jones: If that is so, why does the *West Wales Guardian* refer to the Gallup poll?

I listened in vain for the Secretary of State's apology to the people of Wales for brazenly and blithely inflicting on them an unjust, unpopular and wasteful poll tax, although there was no support in Wales for it. It took a right hon. Gentleman representing the English constituency in Wirral to do that, and he is identified closely with it. The blame for the poll tax lies with the Conservative Government. The Conservatives know it and the people of Wales know it. We know that Conservatives have undermined local government. They have eroded local services and wasted millions of pounds. Time is up for the Government. It is time for a fresh start. It is time for a Labour Government.

8.15 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) can be sure that an anthology of his wit and wisdom is being lovingly compiled and will be extensively used during the next general election, although it would be more effective to play back some of his speeches. I am thinking not of the relatively sotto voce speech that he made tonight, but of the speech that he made a little while ago in the Welsh Grand Committee, which I shall treasure for a long time.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for a fair and generous settlement. I remind him of what has been said about the Prime Minister—that he endeared himself to the previous Prime Minister because, she said, he said no so charmingly. My right hon. Friend says yes so charmingly that even his threepenny bits look like gold sovereigns. I am particularly pleased that, as a result of this and previous settlements, the adventure playground in Rhyl, which has such an important part to play in raising the morale of that rather depressed end of the town, will go ahead.

Members of Parliament, by definition, are never satisfied. We always want more, and I have to record my intense unhappiness that Clwyd county council has for so very long delayed action on Ruthin bypass. Now, in the restriction in the transport supplementary grant, it has been able to find a pretext further to delay the starting of that essential scheme. There are always schemes that we want. I am thinking in particular of the arts centre at Llandudno, on which I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has worked so tirelessly behind the scenes. Local government looks to central Government for support for such projects.

I have a pet scheme of my own—the pier at Colwyn bay, one of the few remaining piers in north Wales, which will shortly fall into the sea unless something is done about it. I was delighted when, the other day, the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside visited it and promised that a Labour Government would find the money to put it right. On this, as on everything else, the hon. Gentleman goes around pledging the moon. The trouble is that the moon has already been pledged, latterly in the shape of revenue support grants. These have been generous, because they had to bring the poll tax down to the low level at which it stands in Wales. Welsh Members are particularly pleased that we have managed to drive English Members of Parliament out of the Chamber, because that means that they will not know what a wonderful deal we are getting.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I am English.

Sir Anthony Meyer: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I am blind in my left eye.

I agree with the fears of the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) about what all this is doing for local autonomy. As my right hon. Friend said, 93 per cent. of all the moneys spent by local authorities no longer comes

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

from any source for which they are responsible for voting. On top of that, there is the threat of community charge capping.

What does all that mean for local autonomy? I do not think that the public care much. For example, they support the transfer to central funding of the police and fire services. They are pleased to see that higher education is now the Government's responsibility. I think that the majority would like to see responsibility for teachers' pay transferred to the Government. Many would like to see education so transferred. They support, and I support, the concept of ring fencing for certain items of local government expenditure. My good friend the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) is not present, but he and I both feel strongly that, if the interests of the more vulnerable sections of our community are to be protected, it may well be necessary to consider ring-fencing the moneys allocated for community care. All that is fine, but where is it leading us?

I recently attended a local government conference in Rouen in France, when I asked my French neighbour how much of the money that his local authority was spending was raised by taxes which were locally decided and voted. He said that it was between 80 and 85 per cent. That is in France, which it is the conventional wisdom among all of us to consider to be a highly centralised country.

Mr. Wigley: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the problems in Wales—it may well be true in the rest of Britain—is the great disparity between levels of living standards and incomes? Areas in close proximity may have vastly different per capita and net household incomes. Therefore, with relatively small local authorities, there is a need, at the very least, for significant equalisation if levels of services are to be common throughout those areas. Perhaps that difference does not exist quite so much in areas of continental Europe.

Sir Anthony Meyer: I am not sure that I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The disparity can be every bit as great in France. One travels around spanking new towns and sees slummy bidonvilles on the outskirts with exactly the same problems, which are often more widespread and acute than ours. France has no fewer than five levels of government which it seems to put up with. I am not recommending that we should.

I wonder what on earth is happening. There was a steady move towards reducing the contribution made by the Government to local government, and by 1985-86 it was some 47 per cent. That has now risen to 93 per cent. That is almost entirely the consequence of the unacceptability of the poll tax and the need to sugar the pill, but the effect on local autonomy has been catastrophic. I should like to think that that effect was completely unintended, but I must take into account the destruction of all the countervailing centres of authority. I rejoice in the diminution of the power of the trade unions to challenge elected Governments. However, I observe with less rejoicing the attempts to restrict the activities of some voluntary bodies to stop them entering upon political activity.

All that is splendid, but we are going towards a highly centralised system of government. If ever that system were to fall into the hands of a party holding extreme views, we would be in a terrible plight. I am not sure whether that is not the most lingering legacy of the Government led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher); a more lingering legacy even than what I currently consider to be her greatest achievement, which is the modernisation of the Labour party. There are moments when one feels that the only effective check on the powers of central government is the power of the multinationals, plus the influence and power still exerted by the EC.

Against that rather unpromising background, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is trying to reorganise local government. He will not make the same mistake as his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), of separating the reform of local government from the reform of local government finance. Basically, that is the mistake that Gorbachev made when he tried to carry out political reform without economic reform.

That is why devolution in Wales deserved to fail last time. It was a scheme to set up an elected assembly which would have had the pleasant task of distributing money but none of the responsibility for raising it. Any viable scheme for devolution must include an assembly with revenue-raising powers. I notice that many of those who advocate devolution fall quiet when one talks about that aspect, but it should be faced. However we do it, it will be diabolically difficult to get back to genuine local autonomy.

What locally elected councillor will cheerfully vote for steeply increased locally raised taxes? I just do not know the mechanism whereby we can return to genuinely independent local authorities. If I knew the answer to that, I would be even more of a wizard than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. All I know is that the Opposition do not even have the courage to pose the question.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. It might be helpful to inform hon. Members that, if they were to speak for less than 10 minutes each, it might be possible to call all those who wish to speak. As usual, the debate is in the hands of the House.

8.26 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I shall try hard, Madam Deputy Speaker, to obey your plea by dealing briefly with the one bit of the settlement that I understand. One good reason for not becoming Secretary of State for Wales is that one avoids becoming embroiled in the gobbledegook of the rate support grant with its formula $S-N-(P \times C)$, where C is the community charge for capital spending, quite apart from the total standard spending and the rest. There is a strong case for avoiding that.

But there is one part of the system that I have tried to understand and have watched closely, and that is the community charge or poll tax reduction scheme. We were told that, starting in 1991, a sum of money would be specifically directed to reducing poll tax payments in certain districts. It was not even a borough or district-wide scheme. In Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, it was applied at ward level. We reached the absurdity where one side of the street in one ward benefited from the scheme, while the other side in another ward did not. However, at least one understood it. Money was being specifically allocated to reduce the poll tax to certain householders in the community according to a variety of formulae.

But a couple of months ago in the House the Secretary of State made a statement on the revenue support grant for 1992-93. We all listened and nodded wisely. On the community charge reduction scheme, he said that he intended to make £40 million available in 1992-93. He went on to say that that would provide substantial assistance to charge payers who most needed relief, and that it was double the amount that was made available to charge payers in 1990-91. Any hon. Member listening as well as he could, given the acoustics of the House, would have thought that that was a generous settlement. He would have understood that the Secretary of State was doubling the poll tax reduction scheme from £20 million to £40 million.

I am not given to personal hyperbole, but that statement was pretty close to being dishonest. What was missing was the figure for 1991-92. Instead of saying that the figure was only being doubled from £20 million to £40 million, the Secretary of State said that in 1991-92 it would be £60 million. In fact, the right hon. Gentleman was announcing a £20 million cut in the poll tax reduction scheme. Would anyone hearing that statement in the House or reading it understand that there was to be a £20 million reduction? The Secretary of State did not have the honesty or courage to explain the impact and consequence of the settlement.

Mr. David Hunt: Perhaps I may correct the hon. Gentleman. This year, the figure is not £60 million but £62 million. That is a matter of public record. The hon. Gentleman will recall that, when I announced the community charge reduction scheme, the estimated community charge was £140 higher than it turned out to be. Also, the local authorities that originally proposed the scheme had expressed doubts because they said that the level of money going into it was producing serious anomalies. I therefore rethought the scheme, believing that the last year of the community charge would be the wrong time to make a fundamental change.

Mr. Rowlands: The Secretary of State cannot get away with that. If that is the explanation, why did not his statement include something to that effect? Why did not the right hon. Gentleman say, "As a result of discussions, I have reduced the value of the scheme from £62 million to £40 million. I have kept £22 million." Instead, the Secretary of State disingenuously told the House, "I have doubled the 1990-91 figure." That is why we do not trust much of what is said about that settlement.

The scheme was directly related to the individual poll tax payer. I can tell the right hon. Gentleman what that £22 million cut means in my constituency, ward by ward.

Mr. Hunt: The figure was not £22 million.

Mr. Rowlands: Of course it was. As the right hon. Gentleman has misled the House once, let him listen to the figures.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not imagine that the hon. Member meant what he just said. Perhaps he will reflect on that remark, and rephrase it.

Mr. Rowlands: I always thought, Madam Deputy Speaker, that "misled" was a legitimate parliamentary term.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I know what I am talking about.

Mr. Rowlands: I am suitably chastened, Madam Deputy Speaker, and of course I withdraw that remark. However, I hope that I may apply the posh word "disingenuous" to the Secretary of State's statement to the House that he was doubling the amount available for poll tax reduction, when in fact he was cutting it by £22 million in respect of Welsh poll tax payers.

Mr. Barry Jones: My hon. Friend makes a devastating set of remarks about the Secretary of State's technique. I remind my hon. Friend of an exchange during Question Time, when the Secretary of State told the House that 100 per cent. of the poll tax was being collected. It took an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) to persuade the Secretary of State to correct himself, and say that he meant that 100 per cent. of expected poll tax collection—94 per cent. of that payable—was being collected.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend emphasises my point.

I will tell the Secretary of State the consequences of his £22 million cut in the poll tax reduction scheme for Welsh communities and wards such as those that I represent. In Bedlinog, the increase in the poll tax will be 40 per cent., before one additional penny is spent on extra salaries, services, or inflation; in Dowlais, 36 per cent.; in Merthyr Vale, 47 per cent.; in Pant, 23 per cent.; in Park, 22 per cent.; in Troedyrhiw, 49 per cent.

That will be the effect on communities that are considered to be in deprived areas and deserving of extra support of the cut in the poll tax reduction scheme. Nothing in the Secretary of State's original statement or in his remarks tonight brought it home to people that that would be the true consequence of his decision.

I hope that, if nothing else, we shall be able to print at the bottom of every poll tax demand issued in those wards the fact that the extra £17 that everyone must pay is the surcharge placed by the Secretary of State on those communities.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Before the hon. Gentleman gets carried away, the House ought to be aware that, in Dowlais, for example, the amount of relief per charge payer in the coming year will be £41.

Mr. Rowlands: But the actual amount payable will increase by 36 per cent. The Secretary of State did not make any announcement to that effect when he made his original statement or at the Dispatch Box earlier today. We should not be kidded in that way. The people of Wales and the people of my communities will not be kidded. This is a Hunt surcharge on poll tax payers in communities that, only a year or two ago, were said by the Secretary of State to be the poorest and most deprived.

It is hard for anyone to come to terms with absolute statements of the kind made by the Secretary about increases in expenditure when responsible and respected borough and district treasurers, who are not known to suffer from hallucinations, tell us that, if environmental improvements, such as in waste disposal, are to be made, if they are to take up the generous allocation for home

[Mr. Rowlands]

improvement grants, increase staffing, pay higher loan interest charges or even pursue policies mutually agreed between the Welsh Office and the Secretary of State and Labour-controlled county and district councils, the effect will be to increase the burden of revenue expenditure and to push those authorities to the level of potential capping.

Borough treasurers write to my right hon. and hon. Friends, as they do to Conservative Members, pointing out the consequences of increased expenditure resulting from legislation passed by the House, and introduced in the pre-election run-up by a Secretary of State who seeks sometimes to humiliate local authorities into taking action under the so-called citizens charter. We are entitled to say that the responsibility should lie with those who made those decisions. When it comes to the introduction, the implementation, and, even in the poll tax's death throes, the cut in the reduction scheme, the Secretary of State is the person responsible for the burden we face.

8.37 pm

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) is not in his place, because I was infuriated by his claim that the poorest of his and my constituents, and those of other right hon. and hon. Members, are suffering under the community charge. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that they receive income support and that the element of income support calculated for community charge is based on the average charge for England and Wales— which is far higher than 20 per cent. of any community charge imposed in Wales.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside knows also that Welsh community charges are extremely low by any standard. Even Cardiff, and South Glamorgan this year, will be making a charge of less than £3 a week per head. That is a jolly good bargain for the services that are provided locally. Some of my constituents will be charged £1·60 per week after diminution, which is remarkable value.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) made the point that if local authorities and local government are to mean anything, they will have to raise more money locally. I wonder how people will squeal and scream at the charges and taxes that will be levied on them. If devolution were ever to come, would we ever have an assembly funded more than 90 per cent. by the British Parliament? You can bet your bottom dollar that would not happen, because the House would have no power over such an assembly, and would not be able to control its expenditure. It would, therefore, be a minimal amount which came from this place, with the maximum being raised in Wales by a Welsh assembly. Anyone who wants a Welsh assembly had better look out for the reaction of people in Wales to such a demand when they realise what will happen.

Having served in the Welsh Office during the period of the community charge and being responsible for housing and other matters, I want to pay tribute to the local authorities in Wales and to say how fortunate we are in being a small country where Ministers can get to know the councillors in charge, the chairmen of committees, the treasurers and so on, and where we can sit round a table, know each other personally and thrash these things out. That is how standard spending assessments are worked out, in agreement with each other—a point somewhat overlooked after the announcement, when people strike attitudes. It is noticeable, however, that with this particular set of settlements attitudes are pretty wishy-washy. It is a very good and reasonable set of settlements. The amount that councils have been given is well ahead of inflation at a time when the economy is stuck. I should have thought that on any basis that is a very favourable settlement.

The discipline brought by the community charge, together with the threat of charge capping, which has never had to be used in Wales, has encouraged councillors to increase efficiency and make every pound pay. If the Labour party got in and were to change the system yet again, and if they were to do away with the Audit Commission, which is part of their policy, we would be off again on the giddy roundabout.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside mentioned council house building in the splendid year of 1975, when the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) was going round telling councils to "spend, spend, spend". My word, they did, and 15 months later we were international paupers because we were bust. All hon. Members know just how their councils ground to a halt. A major estate in my constituency at Llanedeyrn came to a grinding halt with no shops, no facilities, nothing—houses not finished and roads uncompleted. Everything resulted from the crazy expenditure of money at that time. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney knows that very well.

Mr. Rowlands: Perhaps the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) remembers, as I do vividly, that what we had to do in 1974-75 was pick up half-built private housing estates that had gone bust during the last private Tory housing boom.

Mr. Grist: I remember one estate in my area which the council "municipalised". As soon as we came to power in 1979 it was the fastest place for everyone to purchase his own house. I remember a party-political film unit coming to the constituency. I was asked where it could go to see people who wanted to buy their own houses, and I directed them to that estate, Ty Cerrig. They would have bought them from the word go. The municipalisation was unnecessary. It shows the sort of Government that we had then, which got away with municipalising, nationalising and spending. That is what we would have again. We have had a plethora of promises to free local government, which means spending more and more on housing, roads, education, all things which are highly desirable and all things on which we have been spending more money steadily and carefully; but under the promises of the Labour party we would have a burst of expenditure once again and we would be back to 1975, apparently the chosen year for the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside to remember.

I would like to mention a purely constituency matter, although it has reference to what other hon. Members have said, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), with his medicentre and the row with South Glamorgan and the hon. Member for the Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith), who has unfortunately left the Chamber, and that is South Glamorgan's behaviour over Corpus Christi school in my constituency.

I should like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North for having brought this matter up several times in the past.

Corpus Christi is a Roman Catholic school, the premises of which had been found to be unsafe. It is in a highly residential area and is long established. The area has been built up round the school so the roads which surround it have taken into account the layout of the school as regards traffic reactions and so forth. The authorities decided not to rebuild on site, although it is a big site and they could have done so perfectly well. They decided to move to a new green field site and sell the existing school. Because the proposal broke the local structure plan, the archdiocese and the county applied to the city council for permission to develop houses and to raise the money.

The city council refused to give them permission. The county therefore purchased the 15 per cent. owned by the archdiocese and granted itself planning permission on the site. That is an abuse of power which we considered in 1990 and put out to consultation. I believe that we are going to put out some rulings on it shortly, but, unfortunately, perhaps not in time to catch that particular abuse.

The site, with more than 100 houses, will debouch on to a small set of estate roads where, I am told, the traffic will be less than from the school. I find that unbelievable. Once cars are parked down one side of these roads, two-way traffic becomes difficult because one must dodge round the vehicles, so perhaps we shall have parking restrictions and all the rest of it clamped on the estate to accommodate the extra traffic which will flow out of these 100-plus executive houses.

The school itself is planned to go out of my constituency to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North, on a green field site on the edge of the city to which coaches will have to take all the pupils. It is a site for which a private Catholic school applied two years ago and was turned down, but the county has purchased the land for £1 million or £2 million—I forget which—and is prepared to grant itself planning permission yet again and to get Welsh Office funding to do so unless Welsh Water puts such a charge on the site that it becomes impossible. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State ought to think again, call in the proposal and consider the widespread unease and dismay at the activities of the county council in abusing its power. If county councils and other authorities abuse their power in this sort of way they lose a great deal of public sympathy which otherwise they thoroughly deserve.

8.46 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): The altercation that I had with the Secretary of State about finance in Powys is causing serious concern within the county, and I hope that there will be an early opportunity for the chief executive and representatives of that council to meet the Secretary of State to discuss the matter. The standard spending assessments hardly cover inflation, especially when it comes to current teachers' salaries.

There will be further expenditure which local authorities will have to incur because of recent legislation. The Children Act 1989, in particular, places responsibilities on local authorities necessitating more resources. The same is true of community care and other recent legislation.

In the settlements recently announced by the Secretary of State there are winners and losers. I thank him for a good settlement in Radnorshire. Unfortunately, his Department has blotted its copy book with Radnorshire in the past couple of days, something that I shall refer to later.

The Secretary of State has been a little miserly in the settlement for Powys. Powys is setting a community charge of £100 which is spot on what the Secretary of State proposes. It has tried its best to work within his guidelines. The inevitable result, given the threat of capping, of some current settlements that authorities have achieved will be a cut in services in the coming financial year. In the districts there is a very sad story, with the failure to release funds from council house sales which has failed to fund the necessary housing to rent and will certainly fail to solve the housing crisis and resulting homelessness. As has already been mentioned, just over 70,000 people in Wales are on housing waiting lists. That is a serious and human problem, which confronts families every day.

The Secretary of State has engaged in a discussion—almost a debate—with the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) about the level of community charge collection. In previous years, the collection rate in my part of the world has reached 97 per cent., which is higher than the average of around 94 per cent. to which the Secretary of State referred. Local authorities in the area have been very responsible, although, like some hon. Members, they do not agree with the principles of the community charge.

The Government's distribution of cash to local authorities is very much a lottery. As the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) pointed out, the system is complex and difficult to understand. It needs to be simplified, because the formulae involved create distortions.

As I have said, we in Powys are very dissatisfied with our standard spending assessment. In an earlier intervention, I made a slight slip. I said that the revised assessment was 6·3 per cent., against a Welsh average of 8·2 per cent.—about 2 per cent. behind. Every time the Welsh Office revised the figures over the months between December and the present time, slightly less was allowed for in Powys. I do not mean that as a deliberate slight on the Secretary of State and his staff, but the fact remains that the regression analysis used to calculate the figures appeared to give Powys a smaller reward over those months.

That needs some examination. The knock-on effect has meant a cut of £600,000 in Powys's education budget, and many schools in the local management of schools scheme are having to cut their budgets. In recent weeks, I have come across many village primary schools whose LMS budgets face cuts of between £12,000 and £20,000—and that, of course, means cuts in essential services.

It is an enormous problem and it is compounded to some extent by the teachers' pay settlement. It all depends on how the counties have made their calculations for the coming year. We in Powys welcome the 7·5 per cent. settlement: teachers deserve a good settlement. It could have been better, but at least they have reaped some reward—although I suspect that it constitutes something

[Mr. Richard Livsey]

of a sweetener. We have seen the same kind of sweetener in many parts of the public sector; we are, after all, within weeks of a general election.

Although it is welcome, that 7·5 per cent. settlement does not cover the requirements of teachers' pay throughout 1992. The local authority must find a further 2·3 per cent. from the previous year. My authority's full-year costs for 1991-92 represent an additional 1 per cent., and it faces a total 9·8 per cent. increase in teachers' salary costs. That shortfall must be met from the SSA settlement of 6·1 per cent.

We must take account of the precepts on county budgets. The Dyfed-Powys police authority, for example, has a precept of 11 per cent. in the coming financial year. That is way above the inflation level, but the county must find resources to assist the police authority. The land drainage precept has been increased by 10 per cent.—again, way above inflation. That puts the county budget in a difficult position. Then there are capital financing charges of 8·7 per cent. That must be added to the cost of extra pupil numbers in schools, and the implementation of the Children Act 1989. The additional demands on the county budget must be met; something has to give.

The district councils are also experiencing variable results. Until the announcement by the Welsh Office on 11 February, we thought that the Radnorshire settlement announced on 20 January was fair. Somewhere along the line, however, Radnorshire lost £90,000 between the two dates. That is causing considerable problems for the Radnorshire treasurer, because many details of the budget had already been worked out. I know that the Secretary of State will be receiving representations from the district. In local authority finance terms, £90,000 may not sound much, but—as the Secretary of State well knows—Radnorshire is a relatively small authority.

Mr. David Hunt: Late last night, Mr. Jonathan Evans telephoned me to say that there was some concern in Powys. I agreed with him, as I agree with the hon. Gentleman now, and I am very willing to speak to council officers if that is required.

The recalculation of Radnorshire's SSA to take account of teachers' pay meant that, for reasons of consistency, other changes that had arisen after the original calculations had been undertaken needed to be taken into account. They included the surrender of supplementary credit approvals totalling £600,000, because of the decision not to proceed with the Llandridnod Wells leisure centre. The approvals have been recycled for use by other districts and the loan charges element of Radnorshire's SSA has been reduced as a result.

Radnorshire still has a higher percentage increase in SSA than any other district—19·1 per cent., compared with an average of 8·7 per cent. Its SSA has increased by over 43 per cent. since 1991.

Mr. Livsey: I thank the Secretary of State for going into such detail. Those developments, however, result from changes in teachers' pay—which, after all, is a county rather than a district function. I know that there is a spin-off.

Mr. Hunt: I was merely saying that, irrespective of the county function, the fact that the figures were being recalculated because of the need to take the county's figures into account meant that the district's figures were brought up to date. Of course, Radnorshire's figures have nothing to do with the teachers' pay calculations.

Mr. Livsey: Nonetheless, quite a stir has been created in the district, and I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will receive representations from it, too. I hope that he will take more notice of the statements that I am making than of quotations that he appears to have received from my Conservative opponent in the constituency. He has a tendency to listen more readily to Conservative candidates throughout Wales than to Welsh Members of Parliament. That is a very unacceptable state of affairs, which has been repeated time and again.

On the other hand, I am very grateful indeed to the Secretary of State for agreeing to meet a deputation from Powys. I know that they welcome that opportunity. I hope that by thanking the Secretary of State for it I shall make it clear that I want to be even-handed.

There is a very sad state of affairs in housing. The current extent of homelessness is entirely unacceptable. I spent part of last Saturday evening trying to assist a parent and four children to get a roof over their heads for the night. The family ended up in a police station looking for help. I am sure that that experience is shared by many Members of Parliament. We are having to pick up the pieces of a failed housing policy. It is immoral that people should be thrown on to the streets because affordable housing is unavailable as a result of the failure to build council houses in the last five years. The Government are refusing to release funds—the councils' own funds—for this purpose. In respect of housing, as in respect of the poll tax, the Government have failed. The poll tax is one of the worst reforms to have been introduced this century. It does not address the question of ability to pay, and we are now talking about a local government settlement that involves picking up the pieces.

9 pm

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): Before coming to my main remarks I should like to express strong support for the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) about the Rhuddlan bypass, which is important not only to the town of Rhyl in his constituency but to the town of Prestatyn in my own. Both towns depend heavily on the tourist industry, and it is important that access to them is easy. The bypass will improve access, so it is important that work be started as soon as possible. I hope that my right hon. Friend will bear these remarks in mind. We understand from Clwyd county council that the reason for the postponement is connected with the transport supplementary grant.

I want to refer to a point made by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out in his opening remarks, the level of central Government support for local authority revenue expenditure in 1991-92 shows an increase from 79 per cent. to nearly 93 per cent. I do not regard this as a healthy development, even though it is probably temporary. We are rapidly approaching the position taken by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson): that all local authority revenue should be raised centrally, that we should abandon any attempt whatsoever to replace the rates whether by the poll tax, or the council tax—or whatever else is proposed. I do not go along with that, although I have reservations about the council tax, to which I shall come in a moment. We are rapidly approaching a situation in which central Government provide nearly all the finance for local authorities. That is not healthy. I believe in strong, representative local government. If we are to have that, councils must have a right to raise revenue to a much greater extent than is the case now or is likely to be the case with the council tax.

Before elaborating on those remarks I should like to comment briefly on one or two aspects of the community charge in its dying days. The average cost of collecting the minimum contribution of 20 per cent. of poll tax from those on social security benefit is £6 more per head than the amount raised. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) is not usually like this. I am actually supporting him, but he is ignoring my support. It is important that we realise how expensive it is to collect the poll tax from people on benefit. It is absurd that the cost should be £6 more per head than the amount collected. The whole 20 per cent. is covered by the uprating of income support. In fact, people in Wales who are on benefit do well. They receive an uprating of 20 per cent. of the average community charge throughout England and Wales. Surely the sensible thing for the Government to do would have been to reduce the income support by 20 per cent. rather than waste money in attempts at collection. Surely it would be fairly easy to do this and cheaper than collection of the 20 per cent.

The case for abolition of the minimum calculation is overwhelming—*[Interruption.]* I want to get on. As I am agreeing with points that have been made by the Opposition, I do not understand how contention can arise. This is an unnecessary distraction for councils at a time when the transfer to the council tax is having to be made.

The second point relates to the community charge reduction scheme. My right hon. Friend knows that I have always been unhappy about the fact that we have a different community charge reduction scheme in Wales from that in England. The English system is much fairer and much better targeted. It is targeted towards individuals rather than towards whole community council areas. When my right hon. Friend made his statement on 13 January, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) said that, if my right hon. Friend's predecessor had listened to local government leaders in Wales, he would not have produced such an "inane" scheme.

When I tackled my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) on the issue when he was Secretary of State for Wales he said that he had listened to local government leaders in Wales and that they had come out in favour of a community charge reduction scheme that was oriented towards community council areas rather than towards individuals, the argument being that that would cost a lot less to administer and therefore there would be more money to spread around.

This scheme has created absurd anomalies. To illustrate my point, let me take the example of Rhyl and Prestatyn. The west end of Rhyl is a very deprived area. In 1991-92, Rhyl poll tax payers had a reduction of £48, whereas the poll tax payers of Prestatyn—many of them in similar housing, and in some cases in less good housing—had a reduction of £1. In the next financial year, 1992-93, the reduction in Rhyl will be £31 and in Prestatyn zero. The whole thing is cockeyed. It is as unfair and inequitable as the rates. It would have been much more sensible and much fairer for us to have adopted the English system that is oriented towards individuals rather than towards community council areas.

Mr. David Hunt: I thought very carefully about this, as my hon. Friend knows, and considered what he has just said, but I felt that in the final year of the community charge or poll tax it would have been wrong to ask everybody in Wales to complete an application form for community charge relief. I hope that my hon. Friend understands that.

Mr. Raffan: Yes, but rather than giving blanket assistance to all people in a community council area, it would have been far better in the first place to direct it towards those individuals who have suffered particularly badly.

My right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench regard the council tax as a safe haven from the poll tax. They believe that the storms will abate and that we shall sail into smoother waters. The Opposition look smug, but how many versions of a replacement for the poll tax have they produced? Is it 63, at the latest count, or 64? Perhaps there has not been one this week. The Opposition have been very quiet this week, but no doubt there will be at least one more press conference at which they will produce one more version of their replacement for the poll tax.

The Opposition have to be fair. It is all very well for them to attack Conservative Members and Treasury Bench Ministers. I was a member of the Committee that considered the poll tax Bill and I am as guilty as anybody. I regret my support for the poll tax. If the Opposition want me to apologise, that is fine, but at the same time they must apologise for crawling to the International Monetary Fund in 1976 and for slashing public expenditure on water and sewerage infrastructure and so on when the last Labour Government were in power. If they are prepared to do that, we shall be quits. My point is that they have to come up with their final alternative and they have not yet done so. I notice that no Labour Member is rising to his feet. I certainly do not want to encourage any of them to do so.

I understand that the council tax will provide about 14 per cent. of local authority revenue, on average, in the United Kingdom, but even less in Wales. The rest will be provided by central Government grant and the uniform business rate. In my view, that is far too low a percentage of local authority revenue to be raised by means of a local tax.

The council tax alone is under local authority control and must finance any additional council spending. On average, a 1 per cent. increase in spending will require at least a 7 per cent. increase in council tax bills. The gearing, therefore, is 7:1. It may be more than that. I was interested in what the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) had to say about standard spending assessments, which he referred to as "estimates"—which is clearly what they are. They are not precisely determined and can never be so. However, the amount of gearing depends upon the accuracy of the SSAs, which are the Government's estimate of the amount that counties need to spend to provide a standard level of service. As I say, they cannot be calculated precisely and the council tax increase that will be required to cover any underestimate in the SSAs will be magnified by the gearing factor.

[Mr. Raffan]

Gearing was a major factor, if not the sole factor, in the downfall of the poll tax. Yet it is still a major feature of the council tax. That is what concerns me. The council tax is a better and fairer tax. I will not get too carried away because, although I will not be here in the next Parliament, my words may be thrown back at my hon. Friends. I am not particularly enamoured by the council tax. At least it got us off the hook of the poll tax. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] We all know that, so why not say it. We do not want to move from one fire into another fire and, as I have said, I am concerned about gearing.

The only way around the gearing problem, to diminish it, would be for councils to control more than the current 14 per cent. of their expenditure in the United Kingdom as a whole. That could be done by reducing the number of services for which councils are responsible. I am not keen on that idea and I do not think that many hon. Members would be keen on it because most of us believe in local government and I want to see it strengthened. I would not be too unhappy about the fire service and the police being hived off, but no more than that.

Another way to diminish gearing would be to make councils responsible for raising more of their revenue. We could, for example, give them control of the business rate. I have reservations about that. At least now business and industry are able to plan ahead, knowing roughly the bills they will be facing with the uniform business rate.

I remember my first few years in the House. Just before the rates were set, industries and businesses came to see me as they were justifiably anxious about the rise in rates in Clwyd. So, if they were once again to be given control of the business rate, there would have to be certain limits so that increases would not damage industry or competitiveness. There must be other ways to diminish the gearing factor and I should like them to be examined. Councils should have the right to raise more of their revenue.

The main problem with the council tax or any major reform of local government finance—on this I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West and, although we did not compare notes, we think similarly —is that we are dealing with local government reforms the wrong way round. We are dealing with them in reverse order. This follows what I said in the debate on the Queen's Speech. We should have started with functions and internal management, moved on to format and structure and then dealt with how to finance the new structure with its revised functions. That is what we should have done in an ideal world. However, we are in a post-poll tax world, not an ideal one. Because of the political necessity of replacing the poll tax as soon as possible we had to deal with local government finance first. If we had done it in the order that I suggested, we would have had a much better chance of getting the local government finance system right.

All local government reforms—functions, finance and format—should be conceived and considered in relation to an all-Wales tier. I said on the radio the other morning, probably before most hon. Members were up—although I know that one person was up—that the first attempt to introduce Welsh home rule was an amendment to a Bill dealing with local government. It was moved by T. E. Ellis, the then Member for Merionethshire. That is how home rule was first attempted in Wales. Post second world war, it has been referred to as devolution. We must look at an all-Wales tier in a pragmatic way.

It is no use my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary talking about a Mickey Mouse Parliament. That will not convince anybody. There must be arguments from Ministers on this issue. If we move to one-tier authorities, where will the strategic planning and the transport and infrastructure planning happen, and who will carry it out? These are all-Wales issues and they need an all-Wales tier. Currently, on devolution, the Government seem to be blinded by the headlights of public opinion, stunned and unable to move other than to grope robotically for historic allusions to past referendums that have no relation to the here and now.

I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement today. That is progress—we are to have a debate on the constitutional issue and, indeed, we should do so. As I said during business questions the other week, if the Scots are to have three debates—one in Edinburgh—we should at least have one, and I am glad that it is to be in Cardiff. I hope that the Under-Secretary will respond to the point raised by the hon. Member for Swansea, East and I earlier today in the Grand Committee. I raise it again now because it received no response—we should have that debate before mid-March, preferably before the Budget so that it will happen during this Parliament. It is an election issue and must be debated before the election.

A new local government tax cannot be successfully conceived and born in isolation, cut off from discussion of the functions and format for which it will pay. Indeed, it should have been considered and debated not only in those contexts but in the much wider context of how local government is to fit in with regional government because they are interlocked and fitted into the government of the nation as a whole.

9.15 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): We shall miss the rapid-fire verbosity of the hon. Member for whatever it is in north Wales. Between his speech and the tie of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), I feel rather dizzy. I do not know whether it is the Amman Valley old boy's tie that he is wearing but at least it adds a little colour to the occasion.

Because of the strictures on time, I shall deal with only two problems, one of which I rehearsed in the Welsh Grand Committee but to which the Minister of State did not answer—the problem of the teachers' pay award. I hope that it can be dealt with during the wind-up speech. I deal with the issue as it applies to Mid-Glamorgan.

As I said in the Grand Committee, if the 7·8 per cent. overall award is granted, Mid-Glamorgan will have to find £1·7 million to pay it. The Government are going to give it additional funding of only £700,000, which means that Mid-Glamorgan will have to find £1 million—a very nice convenient figure. What can Mid-Glamorgan do about the shortfall? It could cut services, which it has already done in some areas; the only alternative—I hope that the Under-Secretary is listening—is to put £3 on the poll tax, and Mid-Glamorgan will have to do that unless the Under-Secretary of State can say now that the Government are prepared to fund the whole of the award.

We know that the award has been made at this time for electoral purposes, so why do not the Secretary of State and the Government have the guts to fund it? If one is going to bribe people, one should at least have the gumption to pay the whole bribe. One should not tell people to pay three quarters of the bribe themselves. That is a bit unfair—even by this Government's yardstick, it is a bit much.

The authority is already budgeting to maintain services: it is about 2·2 per cent. over its standard spending assessment, so there is no way it can fund the award without pushing up the poll tax. I know that you would pull me up for using bad parliamentary language, Madam Deputy Speaker; I would have liked to say that the Government have a bloody cheek to act in the way they have, but I am not allowed to say that.

Another issue about which I am very concerned is that of rents of factories. I am not sure what is happening in Wales, but I have suddenly received a rush—or a rash, however one wants to describe it—of papers coming through my fax from companies in the Rhondda which are being asked for huge rent rises from the Welsh Development Agency or the local authority. Whoever owns these factories—*[Interruption.]* May I ask my hon. Friends to allow me to develop my case for a moment?

The rent rises, whether from the local authority or the WDA, are instigated by the district valuer. He is obliged to advise local authorities on economic rents when the revision takes place—it is like chasing one's tail. The district valuer says to the council, "That is what I consider an economic rent," and the councillors have to implement that rent. If they ignore it, they will be surcharged and called before the district auditor.

The situation is ridiculous. The Rhondda valley has high unemployment, and by any socio-economic indicator it is one of the most deprived areas of the United Kingdom. New factories are being built there, and the Government are saying how wonderful they are to help. I applaud the development, because we need the factories, but now the factories are being shut down because nobody can afford to pay the rents. The daft thing about it all is that 30 per cent. of the factories are empty anyway.

Local authorities have to charge the rents charged by the district valuers, or risk being surcharged. That means that firms are getting thrown out of factories or having to leave them, and people are being thrown out of work. Buildings are being vandalised because there is no one there. That all results in an even greater charge on the community.

I have raised two practical points, and I hope that they can be resolved. The first is the fact that the county council will have to add at least £3 per head to the poll tax in order to fund the electoral bribe for teachers. The second is the issue of rent increases for factories run by the Welsh Development Agency or by local authorities. I should appreciate it if the Minister would deal with those two matters.

9.21 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) on achieving the brevity that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have sought from us all the evening. I shall try to emulate him.

I do not understand why the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) brought up the hoary old chestnut of unspent council receipts. I invite the hon. Gentleman to identify one bank account in Wales in which a local council has on deposit council house receipts that it cannot spend. Such a bank account does not exist anywhere in Wales. Will the hon. Gentleman find me one?

The moneys are used to repay debts already accumulated by councils—and rightly so. If they were not, local community charge payers would have to pay twice.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth) *rose*——

Mr. Jones: I shall give way once only. I am trying to be brief.

Mr. Edwards: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that, in the past 10 years, £741 million has accrued to local authorities in Wales through capital receipts, and that 25 per cent. is still supposed to be spent, according to the Under-Secretary of State? Is he convinced that 25 per cent. of capital receipts in Cardiff is being spent?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman walks into the same pitfall as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor. I invite him, too, to identify one bank account in Wales in which moneys are lying, not being used. The moneys are being used to redeem debt, and rightly so.

I shall pick up the theme pursued by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist). It may be superficially tempting to say what a good deal a community charge represents. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, the average for Wales should be £85—only 7 per cent. of the total that local councils spend. My arithmetic tells me that, for every average community charge of £85, some £1,214 is being contributed from sources outside the local council.

However, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) tried to say on one of his frequent visits to the Chamber, nothing is for free. It is we, the taxpayers, who have to pay all that money—from whatever source it comes. It therefore behoves us as Members of Parliament—indeed, it behoves every citizen—carefully to consider all the implications of local council spending.

The reports before the House are good ones. As my right hon. Friend has said, they again put us in a position superior to that of England. They provide an increase of 8·5 per cent. over the comparable figure for last year, and even a 5·1 per cent. increase over the budgets of local councils in Wales. No one could suggest that that is not an increase in real terms, however, those real terms are calculated.

The aggregate external finance has increased by a massive 24 per cent. As my right hon. Friend said today, and in his statement on 13 January, he expects local councils to rise to the challenge. He was wise to remind us of his capping powers. It would be desirable if we could continue not to use those powers, but I do not believe for one moment that we should flinch from using them should that be necessary.

I am particularly pleased that the uniform business rate has gone up by less than the rate of inflation. That is most important at a time when we want to complete the recovery from the recession. That business rate is a great relief to local companies in comparison with the situation they faced not so long ago, when they were at the mercy of local councils. In the past, Cardiff has been subject to some horrendous rate increases—for example, 97·5 per cent. one year and 54 per cent. another.

In the first year in which the community charge operated, it was reliably estimated that it should have been

[Mr. Jones]

set at £150, but we ended up with a charge of £250. Thanks to the Government, relief from community charge payments has been extended to all community charge payers in Cardiff. The reduction of £140 halved that community charge.

If prudent financial practices had been followed from the beginning by South Glamorgan council, the community charge of Cardiff could have been set at the same level as that for Wandsworth. We could have had a zero community charge.

If I was a member of the Opposition, perhaps I would now be talking about the hidden agenda. Such a discussion about Cardiff is not necessary, because South Glamorgan council, in advance of its community charge debate tomorrow afternoon, has published its plans for extra spending that it would like to undertake. They amount to another £25 million on top of the SSA.

I have been warned by Councillor Bernard Rees, the leader of the Conservative group on South Glamorgan council, that if, heaven forbid, there was a Labour Government, the community charge for everyone in Cardiff would double overnight. My right hon. Friend has already pointed out that even worse might befall those of us in Cardiff, because he told us how the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) envisaged that the community charge in Wales would treble. Instead of the current charge of £140, every charge payer in Cardiff might have to find a minimum of £450. It is conspicuous that, when my right hon. Friend raised that matter in the Welsh Grand Committee earlier and in the Chamber tonight, there was no answer from those sitting on the Labour Front Bench.

What have we got to show in Cardiff for the extortionate demands placed upon the charge payers? My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central has already referred to some peculiar commercial developments that the council has insisted upon. He reminded us of the tennis centre at Sully, and about the Gardenhurst centre for old people in Penarth. I will not comment on them, because they are outside my constituency, but I understand that they are being forced through in the teeth of great local opposition with complete disregard for local people's feelings.

My hon. Friend also referred to Corpus Christi high school, in which I have an interest because there are plans to relocate it at a green field site in my constituency. My local residents and councillors are just as fiercely opposed to that, and I shall continue to support them.

The most notorious of the controversial proposals is to build a medicentre—a commercial development—on one of the few open spaces of the University hospital of Wales. Why on earth is the council going in for that commercial development, especially as it is on a national health service site? Have we any confidence that the council could make those commercial developments work? I have little confidence, and I certainly would not entrust any commercial developments to it.

What else have we got to show for the high demands placed upon charge payers? We spent a lot of time today in Committee talking about education. Unfortunately, South Glamorgan council is one of the lowest spenders per head on education. Local citizens would immediately want to ask about the roads. By local repute, we have some of the worst roads in Wales. I recently called on a constituent, Mr. Full, who is trying to get one solitary extra light in Rhiwbina. He has received exactly the same correspondence from the council for the past 10 years. In fact, he has ended up with a more depressing reply than the one he first received 10 years ago.

I listened intently to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), but I listened in vain for something substantial. I heard some hypocrisy about the RECHAR money, and I feel strongly about that. It is our money, because Britain is a net contributor to the Common Market. At best, it is an example of the problems with which the Government are trying to deal. The Common Market should be a collection of equal sovereign states and money should not be withheld at the whim of bureaucrats.

At worst, it is a case of party politics, because the Commissioner who seeks to thwart our desire for that money is a Labour nominee. I should be more than curious to know what the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside has been doing to persuade his Labour colleague to stop blocking that money for Britain.

I also listened in vain to the hon. Gentleman's speech for a clear-cut answer about how much he would give local councils in Wales. His speech was full of criticism of the Government, but he had no positive proposals to make.

Devolution has been mentioned by more than one hon. Member. I am sure that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) is striving to speak, but before he does so, may I say this: hands off Cardiff city hall. Cardiff city hall is the much-loved headquarters of our local council. For as long as any citizen of Cardiff can remember, it has been the home of Cardiff's local council. I hope that, after the reform of local government in Wales, we shall make that city hall once again the headquarters of a much more local, relevant and loved local council. I accept that we can allow visitors in, but we should never let the city hall be taken over by a remote quango.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon is right to be concerned about the form and geographical convenience of a regional assembly for Wales, but it should be in the style of a slatted shed usually preferred by DIY distributors. Moreover, I am sure that the overwhelming majority of Welsh people would prefer it to be sited in Aberystwyth.

9.31 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): It is interesting that, of the four Conservative Back Benchers from Wales, two have spoken in favour of an elected all-Wales body, albeit their viewpoints differ from mine. I advocate strongly that there should be a national parliament but the need for democracy on a all-Wales level is now becoming an accepted factor. In considering the future of the government of Wales, the future of local government or the structure of financing, the all-Wales aspect must be taken into account. We cannot continue as we are, possibly into another Parliament. If the Government win the election and return for the fourth time as a Conservative Government, perhaps with even fewer seats in Wales—of the 38 seats, the Conservatives hold only six—a democratic deficit will have to be met.

Another problem is how to achieve a proper strategic body if we move to a local government structure as proposed by the Secretary of State in his consultation document. All those questions must be taken on board.

Many hon. Members have referred tonight to the nonsense into which local government finance has now entered. No one could argue that the proportions coming from the centre are probably too high. The methods of raising money at local government level worry all of us. The poll tax is a nonsense and its residual elements are still grotesquely unfair, as the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) said. However, no one could argue that, if we are to have local democracy, the need to raise money locally should not be taken on board. The question is how that should be done fairly and how we can achieve a proper balance between central and local responsibility.

One of the problems is that, in so many ways, local government acts as an agency for central Government. It cannot control so many of its responsibilities and it cannot decide what it does because it is constrained by legislation.

Mr. Anderson: There is very little discretion.

Mr. Wigley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. In the coming year we shall face more responsibility falling on local government in Wales. In 12 months time, the community care package will land. My local authority of Gwynedd faces a bill of some £750,000 and has asked the Secretary of State for help with that money in order to tackle care in the community. As more responsibilty is placed on local government, it will inevitably look to the centre for funding. Clearly, somebody has to pay for those activities, and we must have care in the community. It is not a cut-price option and must be paid for. We must introduce a mechanism to do so in an equitable manner so that those who can afford to shoulder a greater proportion of the burden do so.

My party and I favour a local income tax, but we could argue about the exact way of going about it. However, if local democracy is to mean something, there must be a fund-raising mechanism. I accept that that is equally true on the all-Wales level. If there is to be a meaningful all-Wales tier of government, that must have financial responsibility, which means the ability to raise funds. That could possibly be done by transfer to that organisation of some of the taxes currently raised—for example, value added tax.

I asked a question of the Secretary of State that has still not been answered. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) mentioned the Mid-Glamorgan equivalent of the issue that I raised in the context of Gwynedd, where we have a £500,000 shortfall in relation to the teachers' pay settlement, which has implications. If, as Gwynedd people have told me today, the implications involve either the sacking of a significant number of teachers or a significant increase in the poll tax, I hope that the Secretary of State will be prepared to look at the figures that Gwynedd proposes and show where they are wrong, if they are. If they are right, I hope that he will face up to the implications of that.

We face a housing crisis. One half, or even two thirds, of the cases that come up in surgery after surgery involve people who cannot find a place to live. The Secretary of State cannot avoid the fact that there is a crisis. Since 1979, the number of rented accommodation units available from local authorities has dropped from 308,000 to 226,000—a reduction of 82,000 in the number of council houses in Wales due to the Government's policy of selling them off. Those houses are no longer available and, as the cycle revolves, with people dying off or moving away, their houses are not available for letting to people on the list.

In the same period, the number of private rented accommodation units in Wales has dropped from 114,000 to 80,000—a reduction of 34,000. We have to counter balance against that an increase of only 14,000 in housing association units. Therefore, although we have lost 116,000 units, we have gained just 14,000—a net loss of 102,000.

Those problems would not be as bad if the people involved were in a financial position to buy their own houses, but they are not. They are out of work or, if they are in work, they have the insecurity of seeing redundancies and closures all around them.

In the Dwyfor district of my constituency, 400 people are on the waiting list for housing and cannot get houses, 20 per cent. of the housing stock are second homes which are empty for large proportions of the year and there are 800 houses on the market that people cannot sell. They are for sale at prices that people cannot afford to buy, and the local authority does not have the resources to buy the houses to rent them to those who want them. That is mismanagement.

We must crack the problem because we are creating social problems. What I have described in Dwyfor is as bad or even worse in the Arfon district, where it is compounded by the growth of University College of North Wales, Bangor. We welcome the fact that that institution is enjoying such a successful period, but, as the Minister of State knows full well, the availability of housing in Bangor is chronically low. Some 1,500 people in the Arfon district are on the waiting list. People are sleeping out and sleeping in cars, while families are having to split up, with some members living with the father and some with the mother as they have nowhere to live. That problem must be tackled.

I urge the Secretary of State to look at the financial mechanisms available to local authorities in the coming year to find a way to enable them—in one way or another—to get housing moving again so that it is available for rent to those who need it. There is a desperate need, and we must tackle the problem as a matter of urgency.

9.38 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The most telling part of tonight's debate was the Secretary of State's confession that he considered the English system for the reduction in the charge to be superior—he nodded earlier. He had considered changing the system, but he decided against it. He was told many times in the Chamber last year and received many letters from my constituents and those of other hon. Members urging him to change the system. The reason he gave for not doing so was that he did not want people to fill out a form.

My constituents in Rogerstone in Newport will be paying £158 in poll tax this year, rather than the £117 that people in other parts of the town will be paying. I am sure that everyone in Rogerstone will be happy to fill out the form if it will save £41——

Mr. David Hunt: In many ways the English system is superior—after all, I devised it when I was the Minister responsible for local government, but I recognised that what local authorities in Wales had proposed was a simple, direct system that did not involve the administrative costs

[Mr. David Hunt]

of the English system. So it is not just a question of filling out a form; it is also a question of administrative costs that would greatly reduce the amount of money available in the first place.

Mr. Flynn: The scheme in Newport, West is uniquely demented, as I have told the right hon. Gentleman before. Every poll tax payer there will pay an average extra £17. That has nothing to do with local authorities , or with the right hon. Members for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) or for Worcester (Mr. Walker)—the £17 extra this year is due to the Secretary of State. My constituents accept that. What they will not accept is the reason why they pay more in Rogerstone than in Wentloog which, extraordinarily enough, has nothing to do with the fact that one area is deprived and the other prosperous, that one contains many people on income support and the other does not. The reason is that one area has more farms than the other.

Under this crude system, the old rates were looked at. Some areas containing a large number of farms which paid little or no rates—I refer to Wentloog and Nash—pay rates that are artificially low, but deprived areas containing people on low incomes pay high rates. That extraordinary anomaly applies to Newport but not to Rhondda and many other constituencies in Wales. The Secretary of State has been told about this. I invite him to Rogerstone community centre and to the other areas paying the Hunt levy, which amounts to about £41 extra—and it is not due to additional council charges. It is due to decisions taken by the Secretary of State, who could have changed his mind but did not. My constituents will have to pay this levy because of a blunder by the Secretary of State.

9.41 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Listening to the mumbo-jumbo of the Secretary of State's speech, it seemed to me that he was relying far too heavily on the teenage scribblers in the Welsh Office who tell him that all his financial increases mean that local authorities are doing well. At the end of it all, however, West Glamorgan's education budget for the teachers' pay settlement is underfunded by £1 million. That in turn has led to the education budget having to be cut by £2·1 million this year. When the Under-Secretary replies, perhaps he will tell us whether he agrees with that cut, on which he has insisted.

Meanwhile, the poll tax continues in place. According to the Local Government Information Unit, it has cost the people of Wales £1 billion: two years of £140 subsidy, collection losses estimated by the Audit Commission, the cost of the community charge reduction scheme, the cost of transitional relief and the cost of setting up and administering the poll tax.

The unfair and oppressive 20 per cent. rule is still in place; every £6 collected under it costs local authorities £15 to collect. Leaving aside questions of equity, how can it make sense to maintain the 20 per cent. rule on grounds of efficiency? The oppressive unfairness of the tax continues. On Saturday morning I saw in my surgery a pensioner whose husband had died in December and who had received a poll tax arrears bill for £1·95 even though she and he had paid their bills to the borough council on the dot, week in, week out. We all know of similar examples, and the poll tax will continue to be a major issue in the general election.

Another issue that continues to dog the people of Neath is the discriminatory system of transitional relief that the Welsh Office operates. For example, the community area of Blaenhonddan is getting no transitional relief this coming year, just as it got none in the year 1991-92. How can it be right that a pensioner couple, with a small miner's pension that takes them above the income support level, should be receiving no transitional relief, while I, with a Member of Parliament's salary, in the area of Resolven am receiving £68 transitional relief? There is no equity in that. We both depend on the same services and we both pay for those services, and we do not get anything more or less for that contribution. I ask the Secretary of State to look again at the way that this system is worked.

I have another point, about gearing and the enormous centralisation of financing of local government that has taken place under this Conservative Government. The position is worse than was suggested by the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan). Because only 7 per cent. of a local authority's revenue is raised locally, for every 1 per cent. increase in revenue, the poll tax has to go up by 14 per cent. That is an enormous centralisation. It is not local accountability—it is local strangulation.

After 13 years of destructive rule by the Conservative Government, Wales at last has the opportunity to regenerate local democracy, to empower local communities and give them the right to have a say over their destiny. We shall get that right from a Labour Government.

9.46 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Some of my colleagues have already talked about the housing crisis in their authorities. The difference between the authority that I represent and those that my hon. Friends represent is that I represent the only Conservative district authority in Wales. No Government policy has been more incompetent and inhumane than their housing policy.

A written answer to a question that I put to the Secretary of State shows that £741 million has accrued to local authorities from the sale of council houses in the past 10 years. My authority of Monmouth has accrued £24 million, of which £10 million has been accumulated in the past three years. Brecknock, the authority of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey), has accumulated £24 million, of which £15 million has come in the past three years. In Cardiff, the figures are £79 million in the past 10 years, of which £29 million has come in the past three years. This has happened since the Housing Acts of 1988 and 1989 which effectively put an end to the development of housing by local authorities.

The Government's theory is that local authorities should be enabling people to buy housing, so we have to ask how the Secretary of State and his policies have enabled people on the waiting list in my constituency to get into housing. Those who cannot afford to buy find that there is nothing to rent. The Government introduced legislation that was intended to stimulate the private sector, but we have seen from the figures mentioned by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) that the number of private rented units in Wales has declined. Even in the Government's terms, their policies have failed miserably.

In Monmouth there are 2,500 households on the council house waiting list. There is rising homelessness and no purpose-built accommodation for homeless people. Despite that, the housing revenue subsidy has been cut this year. It is £200,000 short of expenditure on housing benefit. That confirms what people have been saying for years, since the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, that those on low incomes in council houses are subsidising those on the lowest income who are dependent on housing benefit.

Council rents in Monmouth are due to go up by £5·25 across the board. That is a 19 per cent. increase, which is far higher than the increase in the rate of inflation. Officials and councillors are highly embarrassed about the way in which they have to implement those policies in the only Conservative-controlled authority in Wales. In the housing department, three posts are being frozen at a time when it is trying to decentralise its services.

If Monmouth borough council has been able to spend 25 per cent. of its revenue from the sale of council houses in the past three years, why has not one house been built this year? Where has that 25 per cent. of £10 million gone? There is widespread concern in my constituency that that money is being put aside to build new council headquarters on land partly owned by the leader of Monmouth borough council. That was suggested on an HTV Wales television documentary just before Christmas. I hope that it can be confirmed that that is not the case, but there is no support for the building of new council headquarters at Portskewett on the edge of my constituency and the borough.

Even if we accept the Government's argument that money is going into housing associations, only 108 houses are under construction by housing associations in the current year according to a reply to me from the Under-Secretary of State during Welsh questions two weeks ago. How on earth will those 108 houses enable the 2,500 households on the council house waiting list to be rehoused? I can only conclude that, as I said at the beginning of my speech, the Government have no policy which is more incompetent and which even in their own terms has failed more than their housing policy. We need a Labour Government to rectify that.

9.51 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I want to return to the question of the funding of the teachers' pay award, because the Secretary of State, in his answer to my earlier intervention, showed that he knew the answer to my question but was hiding under the hypothecation halo of the Treasury. He told us at the beginning that, in drawing up his plans for local government spending and the Government's contribution towards it, he had estimated what the teachers' pay award would be. He admitted that he had underestimated, and so had made a further contribution.

Therefore, I plainly asked the right hon. Gentleman what the difference was that the local authorities would have to find, and I hope that the Under-Secretary will tell us when he replies. In Mid-Glamorgan, the difference is about £1 million, and in West Glamorgan it is a similar figure. In South Glamorgan it is not far short of that. The Minister must be able to give the figure that the local authorities are expected to find by way of efficiency savings to make up that shortfall.

How does the Welsh Office estimate the efficiency savings that local authorities can make when it draws up its funding proposals for local government? Year by year, it has assumed that there is scope for such efficiency savings. Can it give us an estimate of the likely efficiency savings in local government for the coming financial year? At the same time, will the Minister tell us what the efficiency savings for the Welsh Office will be for the forthcoming year?

Is it not true that central Government spending has risen massively during the Government's lifetime? They have the audacity to accuse local government of overspending and to turn the screw on it while not accepting the blame for their own profligacy, of which the poll tax is the outstanding example. If Ministers had been any body of councillors in the United Kingdom, they would have been surcharged and prevented from serving on any elected body for the rest of their lives.

Local authorities are having to struggle desperately to maintain services. That struggle resulted in appalling decisions having to be taken. The Secretary of State pointed out that my own authority is in the top four for poll tax collection in Wales. There are stories of human hardship and misery behind the accumulation of that money. In the last two months of this year, Ogwr, which has a good record for poll tax collection, will stop the adaptation of properties for the disabled. That is an outrage, but the money has run out. The provision of central heating for people having medical priorities has been stopped because the authority does not have the money for that either.

The Welsh Office says that it is the provider of largesse beyond the dreams of any local government leader, yet there is example after example of difficult decisions being made by local authorities as to which services can be provided, and which must be cut back.

The Government and Welsh Office Ministers will not have the opportunity to bring about their threats of poll tax capping, because after 9 April they will not be in office. It will again be left to a Labour Government to pick up the pieces of the disaster that Tory rule has brought to Wales. Local government spending priorities will have to be reordered to ensure that the people who really need help will get it in the coming financial year.

9.56 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I want to say one word to the Secretary of State or the Under-Secretary, and that is "increments". It is a little like a scene in "The Graduate", in which one of the characters says to Ben, "I just want to say one word to you—plastics." I am sure that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, remember that scene from "The Graduate", which I am sure you saw several times —unless you went to see "The Sound of Music" instead.

The word "increments" is critical. County treasurers say, "If only the Welsh Office would accept the impact of increments on the total cost of teachers' pay next year, compared with this year, there would be no need for 90 per cent. of the hassle and haggling involved in arguing, as we are now, whether or not the rate support grant settlement is fair."

I was disappointed by the Secretary of State's reply to my earlier intervention, when I asked whether local government finance experts in the Welsh Office had reached agreement with county council treasurers' departments on the total cost of providing next year the

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

same basket of local government services, and the percentage increase required to meet it—known as a service standstill budget.

South Glamorgan has a no-growth budget, but that is not the same as a service standstill budget. It is much less than that. It involves genuine cuts, which have already been announced, and have created the same sort of crisis in South Glamorgan that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) mentioned have arisen in respect of education cutbacks in Mid-Glamorgan.

In future years, I would like to see local government finance civil servants and county and district treasurers get together and give evidence to the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs or some other suitable body, with assistance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and other local government finance experts. Right hon. and hon. Members could still engage in arguments about politics, but not about figures. It ought to be possible for finance experts to agree between themselves the expected cost in 1992 of providing the same services available in 1991. Then we as politicians have only to come in and put the cream on the coffee. We can say that if an authority wants to expand services in certain areas it will cost a certain amount extra, on top of the 8·5 or the 7·9 or the 9·8 or whatever figure the finance experts tell us will give us the same basket of services next year as we are already getting this year, our base line which we all know about.

At the moment we are wasting time on a colossal scale in the House every year by going through this charade and being unable to agree because, as the Secretary of State has confirmed, he cannot agree with the county councils and their treasurers and with the district councils and their treasurers on whether we can accurately say what the cost will be, allowing for inflation and also for the particular way in which increments in teachers' pay and so on impact on a labour-intensive service such as local government. We could then reduce our argument to the politics of the situation, whether the public really wanted to pay for extra services, the same services, or lower services. That is what we should be arguing about. I would like the Under-Secretary of State to give some attention to that in his reply.

9.59 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The best thing about this settlement is that it is the last from a Conservative Secretary of State for a long time to come. It has been memorable for the way in which the "demob happy" Tory twins of Clwyd launched their devastating attacks on 13 years of Conservative rule and what the Conservatives have done to undermine local democracy in Wales. It is ironic that the two Conservative Members who are standing down at the election now appear to support the policies of the Welsh Labour party.

For 13 years the Conservatives have used their position to lay waste local government and public services in Wales. They have underfunded local government. They have put 70,000 on the waiting lists, and condemned families to the horrors of homelessness. They have created a crisis in social services, with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary pontificating on what others should do while neglecting to offer real help and encouragement to those who have to work with the most neglected and difficult children in our society. While cutting the real value of pensions, they have transferred the responsibility for the care of the elderly from central to local government. They have paid scant regard to the increasing number of elderly people in Wales and have simply failed to provide the resources to match the need.

They have left us a heritage of crumbling schools, stolen our colleges from us and undermined the development of tertiary colleges in Wales in a callous and cavalier manner which has shocked the dedicated councillors and teachers who have shown love and care for our places of education—the Parliamentary Under-Secretary appears to be laughing at the education of children in Wales—and for the young people who need them so desperately.

That is the record, and the settlement that we are debating today is no different. The districts needed 11 per cent. to maintain vital services; they are being given just over 5 per cent. The Government's SSAs for the Welsh districts amount to £7 million below this year's budgets, and that with councils using £17 million of their own reserves. For 13 years the Government have imposed new duties on Welsh councils without giving them enough money to carry out those duties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) gave the example of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It is a fine thing to want better standards of refuse disposal, street cleaning, pest control and so on, but the shortage of cash is causing problems and distortions. Anyone who has examined the problems of waste disposal in south Wales knows that we have a crisis on our hands which needs a partnership between the Welsh Office and local government, not a diktat from on high or simple percentages on the previous year.

I agree with the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) that care in the community is not a cheap option. We have a terrible shortage of day care facilities for the mentally ill, for adults with learning difficulties, for people with Alzheimer's disease and for their carers, who shoulder such an enormous and painful burden. How can councils pick up that burden when the Government have slashed the proportion that they give towards the cost of local services? Where is the cash needed to create facilities, training for employment and job opportunities for the mentally disabled?

In my own county of South Glamorgan I have great sympathy for councillors who have had to slash £4 million to get within the Minister's unrealistic limits. The cuts have been painful. For instance, they have had to cut money for part-time youth centres. There is a proven link, which I would have thought the Secretary of State himself, in view of his past, would be concerned about, between youth provision and success in combating the rise in crime among young people.

I accuse Welsh Office Ministers of creating conditions in which crime can flourish in many of our communities, which already have pain enough to bear. I cannot fault the local councillors, who have had to give priority to keeping the schools budget intact, but I can condemn the Welsh Office Ministers who have confronted them with such a painful dilemma.

During the years of the oil revenue bonanza, the Government have failed to provide the cash that is needed to bring our schools up to standard. Our councillors have tried desperately to keep up with the need. This year, South Glamorgan has had to cut the building maintenance programme for schools by 40 per cent.—£1·5 million—to meet the Government's unrealistic target and I know that other authorities throughout Wales have experienced the same problem. The Welsh Office Ministers must carry the can for that pain, too.

As several of my hon. Friends have mentioned, the Secretary of State came out with a further devastating announcement this week to add to all that pain. He announced bad news as if he were Father Christmas or the tooth fairy. Let me spell it out. After the news of the teachers' settlement, the Secretary of State has refined his figures and has tried to say that he is being generous. That is a cruel hoax, which might be described outside this place —without fear of legal action—as misrepresentation.

In South Glamorgan, the cost of the teachers' pay award is £1·09 million, but the Secretary of State has increased the SSA by only £540,000. The extra cash that he has provided is even less—only £531,000. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and others have given the equivalent figures for their local authorities.

That means that councillors who have spent months struggling to get within their SSA suddenly have to find an extra £459,000 in cash terms, and £450,000 in terms of cuts, just to stay within that SSA. Until this week, they were succeeding; now, only 24 hours ahead of the rate-setting meeting, the Secretary of State has told them to pull another £450,000 out of thin air. That is absurd and it is irresponsible of the Secretary of State.

I want the Minister to give three undertakings to all the hon. Members who have raised that point tonight. I want him, first, to promise to reconsider the cash allocation; secondly, to promise to reconsider the SSAs and set a reasonable level; and, thirdly, to promise to discount the new cash gap when considering whether to impose a poll tax cap. Only a cynical and irresponsible Minister would fail to give a positive response to all three requests.

Even before that piece of news, councils were plagued by the complexity, rigidity and plain unfairness of the grant system—the so-called SSAs. This is a lottery without sense or logic. Six districts have been allowed increases that would plunge them into financial difficulties. My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) says that his council would suffer a decrease in real terms, and the Council of Welsh Districts has begged the Welsh Office for a safety net or loss limiter to guard against such wild variations.

As the place names show, the effect of the Government's system fall most heavily on our most needy areas, particularly in the valleys. The Government boast about home improvement grants, yet they are reducing the contribution to councils from 90 to 75 per cent., which means an impact on poll tax bills that one estimate puts at some £2 or £3. That is a hidden and dishonest cut for local authorities to bear.

A number of hon. Members have referred to the money provided for economic development, which has suffered a 30 per cent. cut in two years. A number of our local authorities have an outstanding record in securing inward investment. A Secretary of State who seeks praise for his own efforts in that regard should not only acknowledge their success but give them the tools for the job along with the generous praise.

The shadow of the poll tax falls over this settlement. Unlike the Government, the Minister who will wind up the debate still supports the poll tax: I understand from sedentary remarks that he made earlier that he would like to retain it. Will he be honest with the House and the people of Wales tonight?

We have had £100 million wasted and lost to Wales. There have been massive collection problems, the amount uncollected being £17 million. The number of summonses issued is 500,000, and there has been an enormous waste of time and effort for the very people who told the Conservative party that the poll tax would not work.

Even after all the furore of the poll tax, the Government are providing inadequate funds to provide for their new and unfair council tax. The amount being provided for capital costs is inadequate, and for revenue expenditure the provision is £6 million instead of the necessary £8 million. Why, in the name of fair play, should Welsh councils and the people who live in their areas have to pay yet again for the Conservative party's blunders and for the refusal of Ministers to listen to common sense from Opposition Members, who understand and have practical experience of local government finance? Not only have the Government failed to grapple with the whole question of local government finance in Wales but Conservative Ministers have plunged our councils into chaos and wasted millions of pounds, and have then had the cheek to lecture us about tax.

In contrast, Welsh councils have yet again this year proved responsible, spending 1·8 per cent. less than their English counterparts despite 13 years' grievous suffering under the Government. But even now the Conservatives plan more obstacles and burdens for the people of Wales. Those of us who were working until five o'clock this morning in the Committee dealing with the Local Government Bill know that only too well. In a few months' time, thank goodness, a Labour Government will give new meaning to local government in Wales and fresh help to local councils and to those who rely on and enjoy their services.

10.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): Anyone listening to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) would find it hard to believe that the Government are increasing by 8·7 per cent. the total spending assessment for next year and that the provision will be 23 per cent. more than it was in 1990-91. Before the implementation of the £140 general reduction, the increase over two years was 35 per cent. Anyone listening to the hon. Gentleman would find it hard to believe that the average SSA increases of 8·7 per cent. for district and 8·1 per cent. for counties in the coming year will mean that assessments have increased by one quarter in just two years. Nor would anyone know that the Labour party, when it was in power, far from increasing local government expenditure in Wales, reduced it year after year. In 1976-77 provision went down by 4 per cent., the following year the reduction was 8 per cent., the year after it was 4 per cent., and then the party was thrown out of office.

This is the sort of nonsense that we are getting from the Labour party. A party that reduced local government spending complains that the present Government have increased spending by more than the rate of inflation and have made sure that the charge payers in Wales will pay

[Mr. Nicholas Bennett]

only 7 per cent. of the total bill for local government services across the board. Anyone listening to Opposition Members would not know that.

Nor have the Opposition made clear their policies on spending. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), in a speech lasting about 25 minutes, did not once tell the House what level of local government spending would be acceptable to Labour. All we heard from the hon. Gentleman was how his party would spend more every year. Every year at this time the hon. Gentleman makes the same speech about how his party would spend more, about how the local authorities in Wales are hard done by. Not once has he told the House how much more he would allow those local authorities to spend if he were the Secretary of State. He has not said what level of community charge would be acceptable to a Labour Government. We never hear from the Labour party what its real plans are. Those of us who watch the shadow Secretary of State's progress round Wales know that every day another spending promise is made in the Welsh press and on Welsh television. Not once have we been given the prices to go with the menu. That is the Labour party when it comes to local government expenditure in Wales.

We should spend some time warning the people of Wales what the Labour party, if it ever came to power, would mean for local government. First, it would mean higher spending by local authorities. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said that his party planned to increase the proportion of council spending met by the community charge payers in England from 14 per cent. to 20 per cent. If the same figures applied in Wales, that would result in a jump from 7 per cent. to 20 per cent. The Labour party has never told us what its figures would be.

Only a few weeks ago the deputy leader of the Labour party said in the *Local Government Chronicle:*

> "I promise that when Labour is back in government . . . you will certainly get more than you receive now."

Again we were not told by the deputy leader what the promises would mean. The simple fact is that we do not get any honesty whatsoever from the Labour party about its spending plans or its policies, or what its policies would be for raising the necessary taxation.

In 1980 the Labour party said that the rates were unjust. In 1985 the leader of the Labour-controlled Association of London Authorities said:

> "Rates over the years have become widely detested both by those who have to pay them and those who have to defend raising them."

In 1990 the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said that

> "Labour agrees that the rates system was flawed."

But now we hear that the Labour party would bring back the rating system. The people of Wales need to know that. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) says that they would be fair. The word "fair" has the same connotation, when talking about fair rates, as the word "democratic" had in the German Democratic Republic, or that "people" has in people's republics. It is a weasel word that has no connection whatsoever with its true meaning.

The Labour party is already committed to bringing back the rating system with knobs on it. The Labour party would introduce four different factors for assessing rates: market price, rebuilding costs, maintenance and repair costs, and private rents. Of course, the Labour party has told nobody what sort of weighting factors there would be on any one of those four. In addition, the Labour party is committed to an annual rolling revaluation for every one of the 22 million domestic properties. When asked at a press conference about the cost of revaluing 20 million properties four times over, the hon. Member for Dagenham said, "I do not know." That is what we are getting from the Labour party time and time again. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside——

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bennett: No. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside——

Mr. Alan W. Williams *rose*——

Mr. Bennett: There he goes. The hon. Gentleman has just come in. He has not been present.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the Minister in order? All that he has done so far is to attack the Labour party's policies. The debate is about the revenue support grant for Wales. I know that the Conservative party is preparing to be in opposition and that the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) is preparing to be out of work after the election, but is this in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): It is quite in order to compare policies. It is happening in the House all the time.

Mr. Bennett: Had the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) been here, he would have heard silence from Labour party Members about their policies. I have to fill that vacuum by telling the people of Wales what the Labour party's policies are.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bennett: No.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside, who had so much fun in attacking this side of the House, said at this Dispatch Box when he was a Minister:

> "I would go further and call attention to the main anomolies inherent in the rating system."—*[Official Report, 5 July 1974; Vol. 876, c. 848.]*

He now wants to bring back that very system which, when he was a Minister, he was committed to getting rid of.

In addition, the Labour party wants to make sure that council tax payers will pay more. It wants to abolish compulsory competitive tendering and to stop what it calls the privatisation of essential public services. The hon. Member for Brightside said that at the Labour party conference. Furthermore, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) said, the Labour party wants to introduce a Welsh assembly, something which the Leader of the Opposition was opposed to in 1974 and in 1978. Now he is in favour of it. The cost to the Welsh people of a Mickey Mouse assembly in Cardiff would be £50 million. It would duplicate the work done by this House and would ensure that Opposition Members became second class citizens in this House.

We have also heard that the Labour party is against —*[Interruption.]* That is one of the things that it does not like. That is why Labour Members stand up and shout, but they will not achieve their objective.

The hon. Member for Dagenham said:

"I shall be precise. There will be no provision for capping in any legislation that we introduce."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 472.]

The hon. Gentleman also said:

"I promise that when Labour is back in government the coercive element in the local government grant will be removed. You may not get as much from a Labour Chancellor as you want. But you will certainly get more than you receive now."

On 15 February 1991 in *The New Statesman and Society*, when asked whether he would allow councils to increase their annual rates by 60 per cent., the hon. Member for Dagenham said:

"I don't see, even then, that we would want to come in and cap."

That is the prospect for the people of Wales if the Labour party ever came to power. The Opposition's policy would be spend, spend, spend and tax, tax, tax. There would be no Government controls. Opposition Members do not want to hear this. They want to shout it down because they know that it will be electorally unpopular.

Another policy that the Labour party has up its sleeve is one specifically made for business. Instead of a national business rate, whereby we protect businesses by ensuring that there cannot be an increase of more than the rate of inflation, the Labour party wants to take away the national business rate and give control back to the local authorities. The first thing that would happen, as in the old days, is that the local authorities would target businesses for extra taxation in order to finance their high spending plans. Even looking at the first two years of the non-domestic rate, if it had been based on the spending plans of local authorities in Wales, the rate would have been 3p higher than it will be this year as a result of Government controls. The Opposition do not want to hear that because we are pointing out the difference between what they say here and what is in their policy documents and what it will mean for the domestic charge payer and the business charge payer.

We are also told, in the words of the hon. Member for Dagenham, that the Labour party rebate system would "pauperise millions of people". It will be of great interest to the people of Wales to know that a Labour rebate system will make it difficult for many of those who are currently able to claim rebates as of right. They would be losers under the Labour party's policy.

We have heard that the Labour party wants regional government——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I put the Question, I should inform the House that some hon. Members may find it a little difficult to get to the Lobbies. Access is available, but in view of the difficulties, I propose to add five minutes to the Division.

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [7 February].*

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 188, Noes 132.

Division No. 80] **[10.22 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alleson, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Chapman, Sydney
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Curry, David
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Franks, Cecil
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrea, Rev William
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John

Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clelland, David
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1992-93 (Revised) (House of Commons Paper No. 247), a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th February, be approved.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the remaining motions.*

Resolved,

That the Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 4) (House of Commons Paper No. 241), a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (No. 3) (House of Commons Paper No. 153), a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th January, be approved.

Horticulture

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10.38 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I am grateful for the opportunity of initiating an Adjournment debate on horticulture, a subject in which I take a great interest. In addition to my constituency concerns, I am also chairman of the Conservative Back-Bench horticulture committee and parliamentary adviser to the Horticultural Trades Association, a fact that appears in the Register of Members' Interests.

Since this subject was last debated, the Government have made positive moves to help horticulture. I have been approached by many growers and asked to express their gratitude. The Government's commitment of £25 million for the restructuring of Horticulture Research International has been warmly received, as has the recent announcement of a £5 million allocation to improve horticultural marketing through existing and new producer groups. Those are welcome and positive signs for the industry, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to look for further ways to assist horticulture.

Last year was not a good year for the industry. We saw a combination of a £51 million decline in the value of horticultural production and rises in costs and overheads. With the coming of the free market at the beginning of 1992, it is even more important that steps are taken now to enable the horticultural industry to prepare itself for the challenges of a fair and even market. The Government can assist in a number of ways.

One such way is a more equitable writing-down allowance for specialist horticultural buildings. The sophisticated equipment involved has a short working life and should therefore have a short writing-down period. I understand that progress is being made, and I should be grateful for an indication of the timing and likely outcome of those negotiations.

Another is the requirement for local planning authorities to be made aware of the needs of horticulture when considering redevelopment proposals. That is particularly necessary when development is required to meet the needs of new health regulations or the demand for improved standards from supermarkets or other customers.

The removal of all barriers to free trade within the European Community raises other potential problems. There is already a considerable trade in plant material within the Community, and I welcome the opportunities that further deregulation will bring. However, there is stil concern over Community plant health legislation. Britain is entering that arena, having already established a quality reputation because we enjoy one of the highest plant health regimes in Europe. It is essential that that is not diluted in any way.

The British horticultural trade strongly supports the Commission's proposals relating to plant health. They support both the registration of growers and the regular inspection of premises. They are happy that plants should be inspected at the point of production, rather than at national borders, and they like the idea of plants that are moving beyond a certain local zone carrying a passport. One would hope, incidentally, that that would be in the form of a label showing details of the source, inspection and validity of registration.

In theory, all those measures will preserve the existing high plant health standards in the United Kingdom. The problem arises in the practical implementation of regulations. It is essential that other countries are not allowed to treat lightly the necessary details of inspection, registration and implementation of plant passports.

That raises a number of points. First, assuming that growers will be licensed to issue their own passports after inspection, we need to ensure that there are sufficient inspectors to police the standards set. I understand that, although there are to be national inspectors, only four inspectors are proposed from the Community. Can my hon. Friend give some assurance that standards will be maintained throughout the Community?

Secondly, I believe that there will be charges for inspections. How will my hon. Friend ensure that certain Governments do not subsidise those charges, thereby putting British growers at a competitive disadvantage?

I am also concerned that too much detail is being left to member states. Although I welcome that in many other areas of Community activity, we must be extremely careful in this instance. Plant material has many problems that are not shared by inanimate objects. It is vital that all member states adhere to the highest health standards, as determined by the Community. Failure to do so could lead to the importation of diseased plant stock, which could devastate our horticultural industry, gardens and parks. I should be grateful for the Minister's views on how the Community proposes to maintain those standards.

Finally, it is important to get the balance right between an effective system and one that can operate with the minimum of bureaucracy. We do not want to see growers burdened with extensive and expensive form-filling. We must ensure that passports are such that they can be incorporated into existing commercial labels: accepted botanical and horticultural systems are used when naming plants; and costs are clearly apportioned in the regulations.

I realise that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been very firm and supportive on these measures during the negotiations. I urge that the Minister continues to insist on the highest health standards with the lowest bureaucratic fuss.

The changes taking place in eastern Europe affect all parts of our lives, including horticulture. One issue of relevance to the industry is the price set under the association agreements for soft fruit grown in eastern Europe. It is important that these are not set at below realistic commercial levels. To do so would be to the detriment of fruit growers both in the east and in the European Community. I know that my hon. Friend has fought hard on that issue, and I hope that he will continue to be firm in negotiations and resist the erroneous argument that artificially low prices would benefit producers. It is simply not true.

There are a number of domestic matters that are of concern to a large sector of the industry. One such is spray irrigation for container plants. It seems clear that, in this sector, legislation has not kept in line with advances in horticultural production technique. Spray irrigation is controlled by the Water Resources Act 1963 and the subsequent Spray Irrigation (Definition) Order 1965. Those regulations took into account the need of crops that

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

were not growing out in open fields and would be unable to survive without artificial irrigation. In those days, that meant plants under cover—for example, in greenhouses or under cloches. The order exempted those crop-growing methods from the regulations controlling the level of irrigation.

Since the late 1960s, we have seen the growth of container production, which has revolutionised the United Kingdom's nursery stock industry. Currently, £200 million-worth of container plants are produced each year. Those plants are separated from the soil by their containers. Unlike field-grown crops, they cannot draw moisture from the ground. Also, unlike field-grown crops, if they do not receive adequate irrigation every 24 hours during hot weather, they are certain to die quickly.

For the purpose of the 1965 Act, it is clear that container plants fall into the category of protected crops that cannot survive without artificial irrigation. The only reason why the regulations do not already take account of container production is that it was not a factor at the time. I find it hard to believe that there are any reasons not to update these regulations, but if there are, I would be grateful if my hon. Friend could explain them. If not, it is a simple matter to amend the regulations, and I would ask my hon. Friend to do so in time for the 1992 growing season, especially given the prolonged dry season that we are currently experiencing.

The growth in container production is one of the factors affecting the amount of peat used for horticultural purposes. Peat plays a major role in all three main areas of horticulture in the United Kingdom—first, in the retail market, where 1 million cu m are used each year for soil improvement, potting and mulching. Secondly, the amenity market makes use of 300,000 cu m per annum, mainly for soil improvement before landscape planting. Finally, in professional horticulture, growers use between 800,000 and 1·2 million cu m of peat. Those amounts total 2·5 million cu m of peat per year. Putting that into perspective, the total world consumption of peat—mainly for fuel and horticulture—is about 525 million cu m per annum.

British horticulture therefore accounts for under half of 1 per cent. of the total world peat consumption. Horticulture is well aware, however, of the need to reduce peat usage in order to protect habitats not only in Britain but throughout the world. It is taking steps to find alternative sustainable compounds, looking at the three main sectors that I mentioned earlier. In the retail and amenity sectors, peat is used as a soil conditioner and for aesthetic purposes. It is proving far easier to find substitutes for those sectors than for commercial plant production.

For such growers, peat has a number of unique properties which are vital for stock production: it is disease-free; it contains no nutrients, allowing the grower to add these himself to provide a uniform media, which can be adjusted to suit different plants and growing locations; its air-water relationship provides the ideal balance for root growth; and it has ideal water-holding and transfer characteristics. The highly sophisticated peat-based composts necessary for professional modern horticultural production have taken more than 40 years to develop. It is extremely difficult to find suitable alternatives overnight, although significant moves are being made.

Growers are increasingly using peat alternatives to dilute their composts. Some sectors of the industry, such as glasshouse tomato producers, have stopped using peat completely. But much more research still needs to be done into finding true substitutes for peat. The industry is looking at wood bark, coconut fibre, straw and even sewage sludge. All those potential alternatives—and a number of others—will require several more years of scientific trials before we can be assured that they are reliable and safe. The Horticultural Development Council, which is funded by the growers, is spending £100,000 over the next three years to research the issue. It is important to keep a balanced and realistic view of it.

In the short term, reduction in the use of peat can be and is being made in domestic gardening and professional landscaping. To find a substitute for growers, though, is far more difficult and will take some time. Money is being spent on research, and I am sure that any further contribution that the Government might wish to make will be welcome. In the meantime, I ask my hon. Friend to give strong consideration to the detrimental effects on the economy and employment, particularly in rural communities, of any forced ban or reduction. The industry is working to address this problem, but the answer cannot be found overnight.

Any speech on horticulture has to be wide-ranging to take account of the many activities that fall under its umbrella. I want, therefore, to say just a few words on the situation relating to nurseries that serve the forestry industry. My hon. Friend will be well aware of the disastrous effects of the 1988 Budget on forestry, and hence on many nurseries. It seems ludicrous that, at a time when our farmers are being urged to diversify and when the European Community is spending millions of pounds in subsidy, we should remove the financial incentive for forestry.

Britain is a net importer of timber products. There was a trade deficit in this sector of over £5 billion last year, yet farmers are being paid to leave thousands of acres of land fallow that could be used for forestry.

The 1988 Budget removed the tax allowances on the capital charge of setting up a new forestry enterprise. No other business is treated like that. It is clear that the promise of tax-free returns on felling many years in the future holds little attraction to the cash-starved landowner. Consider what has happened: before the 1988 Budget, new plantings totalled 25,000 hectares. Last season, this figure fell to just 10,000 hectares, of which commercial afforestation is unlikely to exceed 6,000 hectares.

The collapse of the creation of new forests in the past three years has resulted in a rapid reduction in manpower and investment in new equipment for the industry. This has been particularly harmful in the upland areas, already struggling because of the agricultural downturn. The resulting and continuing depopulation will reduce the potential to increase afforestation in the future, should the Government wish to do so.

It is not, however, just the lack of financial incentive that is presenting difficulties for the forestry industry. Potential investment is also deterred by the bureaucracy that surrounds the awarding of forestry grants, so vital to any planting. In particular, there is concern over the number and range of groups that are consulted before a decision is made by MAFF. Given the problems that exist in encouraging forestry planting, can my hon. Friend explain how the balance is struck between the views of environmental organisations and the need to promote forestry? Can he also explain what steps are being taken to streamline the system of awarding grants?

I would urge that MAFF consider urgently what needs to be done to encourage greater participation in forestry, because the current system is obviously not working satisfactorily.

The range of matters that I have raised tonight demonstrates the diversity of the horticultural industry, but horticulture embraces an even wider industry than that which I have described, and has interests that go far beyond those matters that are the responsibility of my hon. Friend's Ministry. Roles for other Departments, such as the Department of the Environment's influence on our parks, gardens and open spaces, are well known, but the decisions taken by others, such as the Departments of Employment, of Education and Science, and of Trade and Industry, can also affect horticulture. I hope that we can be assured that there is significant co-ordination of horticultural strategy.

We need to ensure that the industry is given the most effective and productive support to help it to meet the challenges and opportunities that the future will bring. As I said earlier, much has been done. I am sure that horticulture can continue to count on the assistance and understanding of my hon. Friend's Ministry, and I look forward to further advances over the coming years.

10.52 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) asked me a series of questions. She dealt with the depreciation of glasshouses, planning, plant health legislation in the Community, imports from eastern Europe, spray irrigation for container plants, peat and forestry. I shall try to cover as much of that ground as I can, and I shall answer her by letter on any matter that I do not reach in the time left to me tonight.

My hon. Friend raised the question of tax allowances for specialist horticultural buildings. I know that inconsistency in treatment of capital allowances for glasshouses has been of considerable concern to the industry. I have raised this concern with the Treasury, which has agreed that an objective test would be attractive as a basis for determining relief due. It is not straightforward, because a considerable body of case law has to be taken into account. However, my officials have been working closely with the Treasury on the details, and we hope that we will have agreement soon.

Planning policy guidance note 7 issued last month includes guidance to planning authorities on the revised planning controls on agricultural development which came into effect on 2 January. It emphasises the importance of an efficient and flexible agricultural industry and advises planning authorities to take full account of the operational needs of farm businesses, together with environmental considerations, in operating the new controls. Planning authorities are also specifically encouraged to adopt a positive approach generally towards development proposals which are designed, or necessary, to achieve compliance with new environmental, health and welfare legislation.

On plant health, the twin objectives of maximum health standards and minimum bureaucratic burden will guide our policy in this sector in this crucial year, as they have in the past.

We are seeking simple but effective ways to implement the broad framework agreed by the Agriculture Council in December 1991. On plant passports, we fought a long battle in the Council to get the right for the trade to attach their own passports, under inspectorate control, and I am glad to say that we were successful. We are expanding our plant health and seeds inspectorate accordingly. In practice, we are looking to enable producers to choose between incorporating the necessary information on their existing trade labels or, if it is commercially more convenient, attach a separate label. We are aware of the potential impact of the level of charges that we make on the competitivity of UK growers. No decisions have yet been taken.

On imports, it is clear that the potential risk to the high plant health status that we enjoy lies overwhelmingly outside the Community. The present system of phytosanitary certificates for relevant third country material entering member states will continue. Inspections of these plants and plant products will occur when they enter the Community and plant passports will be issued as appropriate.

There are a number of safeguards of United Kingdom growers in this. First, national inspectorates throughout the Community take their duties seriously, and I do not imagine that any of them would willingly allow a pest to be imported when it should not be there. Then, the Community has provided its own inspectorate, one of whose express tasks is to monitor work of inspectorates across the Community so that full confidence can be placed in them. Exchanges of information and techniques will play an important part in this work. Finally, we have the nature of the regime which the Community presents to third countries. As the EC harmonises the different national import regimes this year, it has the opportunity to take the best from each of them and adopt it for its own. We shall be busy this year making sure that that opportunity is grasped.

One of the tasks of the EC's plant health inspectorate, will be to work with national inspectorates to ensure that inspections of domestic production and third country imports are on the same basis throughout the Community. Of the planned complement of 17 EC inspectors, it is intended that nine should be filled by national inspectors on temporary secondment. This movement between the national and Community inspectorates should help to reinforce the harmonisation process. *[Interruption.]* I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I spent two days in the Council sitting between the Portuguese and Belgian delegates, who have been determined to show that there is value in the tobacco regime, and that has led to my having to blow my nose.

As regards imports of semi-processed soft fruit from eastern Europe, the United Kingdom Ministers' positive commitment to the legitimate interests of the soft fruit industry is not in doubt: few other issues are raised four times in a year in Councils of Ministers by a single member state.

[Mr. David Curry]

The Commission maintained safeguard action for 14 months on the criterion of preventing serious disruption of market; this provided some breathing space for longer-term arrangements. The initialled association agreements with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary are due to come into force on 1 March and provide a satisfactory basis for market surveillance and, if necessary, control of imports. The situation in Yugoslavia does not allow for action at the moment.

The Commission is responsible for arranging mechanisms involved in the trigger price system in association agreements. We have made it clear that these should be settled as soon as possible. Minimum prices are important, but so are other details such as speed of transmission of data and compliance with rules on price differentiation for different qualities. As I said in March last year, undercutting prices and failing to maintain market discipline does no good for either the United Kingdom or overseas producers.

Structural measures are matters for the Commission. At the Agriculture Council which concluded yesterday, the Commissioner, Mr. MacSharry, undertook to make structural proposals to help the particularly hard-hit Scottish raspberry industry by 1 April. The new group formation grants are designed precisely to help producers to work together in a more loosely knit fashion than under standard producer organisation rules.

I come now to the question of spray irrigation of container-grown plants. We have consulted the National Rivers Authority about the effect that an exemption would have on water resources and other water users and the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office, as any amendment to the 1965 order would be made jointly with those Departments. I am pleased to say that those consultations have now been completed and we intend to make an announcement in time for the coming season.

On the question of spray irrigation generally, as hon. Members will be aware, we have not had much rain this winter and in some areas rivers and acquifers are at record low levels. Therefore, I urge all users of spray irrigation to use water wisely, review irrigation programmes, and water only when absolutely necessary. Unless it rains continually between now and May, which is unlikely because it is not the cricket season, it is likely that the NRA will have to impose some restrictions on spray irrigation in East Anglia. We have therefore revised our good irrigation practice leaflet which gives details of an early warning system on restrictions on spray irrigation. That will be distributed to all holders of spray irrigation abstraction licences in the NRA's Anglian region at the end of this month.

I am aware of the importance of peat for some sectors of the horticultural industry. The Government made a commitment 18 months ago to examine the question of peat, and to look in particular at the environmental consequences of peat extraction. I welcome the positive action taken by the horticultural industry to encourage the examination and usage of peat alternatives wherever suitable—in particular, in retail and amenity sectors.

For some major horticultural sectors there is still no suitable alternative available. My Department is funding research into the needs of plants from growing media and we shall be working closely with the Horticultural Development Council in taking results forward. That will inevitably take time. My aim now is to ensure that the United Kingdom horticultural industry can continue to have access to efficient and economic plant growth media.

The Horticultural Development Council seminar on peat last year made it clear that substantial supplies of peat are available worldwide, and overseas competitors will continue to have access to them. The United Kingdom container and nursery sectors in particular have been successful in expanding their market and there is still considerable scope for further expansion here and overseas. We aim to ensure that United Kingdom growers are not disadvantaged, and can continue to compete with overseas producers on fair and equal terms.

We have made important changes to the support arrangements for forestry, but we have not removed the financial incentive. Public confidence in special forestry tax reliefs as an appropriate instrument for encouraging new planting had all but disappeared by 1988. That is why we changed to a grants-only approach. We are now targeting taxpayers' money in a more open, acceptable, and effective way, in order to deliver a wide range of public benefits.

My hon. Friend mentioned a figure 25,000 hectares for private sector planting in 1988, but that was when new planting by the private sector was at an all-time high. The average for the previous 20 years was just over 15,000 hectares. We must also remember that we reduced the top rate of income tax to 40 per cent. in the 1988 Budget, and that would inevitably have had an influence on potential forestry investors' decisions. Clearly the time had come for change.

Of course the forestry industry has had to adjust to the new approach. Moreover, it has had to do so at a time when we have been experiencing a general downturn in the economy, and I am well aware that for some sectors, such as the nurserymen, the change has been a painful one. But the Government are not complacent about the levels of new planting. The woodland grant scheme was introduced in 1988 with substantial increases in grant levels. With our aim of encouraging more planting on better quality land, we have substantially increased the better land supplement under the woodland grant scheme from £200 per hectare to £400 per hectare for conifers, and £600 for broadleaves. We recently announced a special community woodland supplement of £950 per hectare to encourage the establishment of woodlands close to towns and cities. From 1 April woodland management grants will provide a contribution to the cost of maintaining and improving woodlands and forests. Also from 1 April the successor to the farm woodland scheme will be in place. The farm woodland premium scheme will have enhanced incentives to encourage farmers to establish woodlands on their farms. The new scheme will be easier to understand and simpler to administer. The simplification of bureaucracy is one of my hon. Friend's principal concerns.

It is important that we remove any excessive bureaucracy that may act as a disincentive to farmers and others to plant trees. However, the planting of trees results in significant changes to the countryside, and we must ensure that the right decisions are taken. If our policies are to deliver social and environmental as well as economic benefits, it is essential that the views of the statutory bodies that represent the interests of local people, amenity and wildlife conservation are sought. The Forestry Commission is charged with ensuring that full account is taken of such interests.

We aim at keeping bureaucracy to a minimum and the commission's forestry authority seeks to ensure that in the vast majority of cases consultations with other interests are completed within four weeks. There will inevitably be those that take longer, but that will be because they are sensitive cases deserving of extra special care—not because the system is necessarily wrong.

It is important that we strike a reasonable balance between the needs of forestry and those of the environment. The forestry commissioners have a statutory duty to endeavour to achieve such a balance, and the consultation procedures are an important element in that. They are backed up by regular dialogue between the commission and other Government Departments, including those responsible for agriculture and the environment, as well as with bodies representing environmental interests and those of the forestry industry intself.

The reorganisation of the Forestry Commission from 1 April will enable its forestry authority arm to focus more clearly on private sector planting and thus be better placed to deliver the Government's forestry policies. I am confident that the measures that I have outlined, coupled with an improvement in the economy, will bring a rise in new planting activity.

My hon. Friend covered a wide range of issues. I have endeavoured to respond as fully as I can. I know that my hon. Friend acknowledges that the Government continue to argue strongly the case for this important and innovative industry both in Brussels, where the necessary legislation will shortly come into force and where the final details of some elements have still to be agreed, and in the United Kingdom, where there are great opportunities in the leisure and other industries. I trust that I have given my hon. Friend some assistance.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 February 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read a Third time on Thursday 20 February.

ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER (GIROBANK) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 4) BILL *(By Order)*

CROSSRAIL BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE SAFETY BILL *(By Order)*

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (GREEN PARK) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (JUBILEE) BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 20 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Child Care

1. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the subject of taxation of child care; and if he will make a statement.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): We have received a number of representations on that subject.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Minister recall that we on these Benches have advocated provision for tax vouchers for child care in the past three Finance Bills? Does he recognise that provision is required for local authorities, voluntary groups and the private sector to provide places in creches and nursery schools? Will he take steps to ensure that that is possible following the Budget?

Mr. Maude: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have promoted all sorts of proposals in recent years, and many of them have been contradictory. At this stage in the period preceding the Budget, he will not expect me or any of my right hon. Friends to say anything about specific tax matters.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my hon. Friend aware that private nursery provision has increased by 50 per cent. in recent years and that efficient councils such as Wandsworth have been able to provide nursery education fully to all the children in their areas?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend makes an important point.

Employment Prospects

2. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those measures which he has taken since November 1990 to improve employment prospects.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): Since November 1990, the Government have reduced interest rates by 3·5 per cent. and retail price inflation has fallen by more than half. Underlying earnings growth has fallen to its lowest level for almost 25 years and economy-wide productivity has increased, helping push non-oil exports to record levels. The foundations have been laid for sustainable growth in both output and employment.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Has the Minister any understanding of the individual human tragedy of unemployment? Is he aware that today's increase is the 22nd consecutive monthly increase in unemployment? Does he know that since the Chancellor and the Prime Minister came to office, some 30,000 jobs, on average, have been lost every working day? Is not the Government's complacency on the matter scandalous and disgraceful?

Mr. Mellor: No, there is no complacency. Unemployment is a tragedy for the unemployed in Britain, just as it is for the greater number of unemployed in France and the United States. We have created a climate for recovery. The key question is not the one that the hon.

Gentleman asked, but, rather, whose policies will be best able to put people back to work? The Labour party will have to deal with that issue.

Sir William Clark: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that far more people are in employment today than in 1979? Does he also agree that a minimum wage and higher taxation would lead to even greater unemployment?

Mr. Mellor: That is undoubtedly so. There are nearly 600,000 more jobs in the United Kingdom today than there were in 1979. My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said that between 1984 and 1990 the United Kingdom had by far the best job creation record of the larger European Community countries.

Mr. Beith: Why does not the Chief Secretary recognise that a period of high unemployment and recession is the best time to spend additional resources on investment in the fabric of our schools, homes and transport? That would put people back to work and give long-term benefits to the economy.

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman knows only too well that in his autumn statement my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was able to announce a £1·4 billion boost to the railways and London Transport and an increase of more than 10 per cent. in real terms for capital works on schools. In addition, for good measure, a substantial increase in the Government's commitment to hospital building was announced. Therefore, I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman has as good a point as he thought.

Sir Ian Stewart: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the best way to provide improved employment prospects is to get inflation and interest rates down, as the Government have done so commendably in the past 18 months? The worst thing to do would be to impose swingeing increases in personal taxation of the sort advocated by the Labour party, because that would undermine the incentive and enterprise on which jobs depend.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. Friend is quite right. As the Bank of England's recent quarterly bulletin made clear, the right environment for recovery is one of stable prices. For the Labour party, inflation is the word that dare not speak its name.

Mr. John Smith: Are not the truly appalling unemployment figures announced today—an increase of more than 53,000, taking the unemployment total to more than 2,600,000, even leaving out the thousands of job losses announced during the present month—ample proof that the Government's incompetent economic policies are certainly not working, but are causing severe hurt? Do the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary consider that the mounting job losses, with all the human tragedy that they bring, are a "price well worth paying"?

Mr. Mellor: It is quite clear that we have a climate for recovery in this country, with falling unit labour costs, inflation below the European Community average and interest rates fully competitive with those of our competitors. Once we get beyond the cheap debating point, has the right hon. and learned Gentleman thought about what the minimum wage will do to unemployment? Does he appreciate the nonsense of the proposal to increase taxation at this time of economic difficulty? The key question is: what impact would Labour policies have on unemployment and the economic well-being of the country? That is the question which the right hon. and learned Gentleman fails to address.

Value Added Tax

3. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the rates of VAT since the beginning of 1979; and the dates of each change.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): Until 18 June 1979, 8 per cent. and 12½ per cent; from 18 June 1979 to 1 April 1991, 15 per cent; and since 1 April 1991, 17½ per cent.

Mr. Enright: I am grateful to the Economic Secretary for his diligent research in producing those figures. Will the hon. Gentleman tell the constituent of mine who is over 21 and earns £50 for a 40-hour week why he has taken a greater percentage of the young man's earnings than he has from his right hon. and hon. Friends who go to the City and, for part-time work, earn hundreds of thousands of pounds? Is not it a fact that the Government are robbing the poor to pay the rich?

Mr. Maples: The only way to reverse what the hon. Gentleman alleges would be to go back to the sort of tax rates that we had under the last Labour Government—83 and 98 per cent. I am sure that it will be interesting to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) to know that Labour Members advocate such tax increases.

What the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) said is not true for the vast majority of the population. A married man on average earnings, with two children, has found that his tax burden from central Government has risen from 32·2 to 32·7 per cent. The great increase has come from domestic rates and the community charge, and we know who is responsible for that—high-spending Labour councils.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it was the last Labour Government who introduced a value added tax of 25 per cent. on certain luxury items?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend does well to remind the House of what happens under a Labour Government. They had a value added tax rate of 25 per cent. My hon. Friend may have noticed that the Opposition have been floating a similar idea among themselves and discussing again in an internal memorandum the possibility of a luxuries rate of VAT. We have no problem in this regard; we do not need to raise taxes—[HON. MEMBERS: "You have."] We have set out our tax and spending plans for the next three years. The Labour party has set out only its spending plans, including plans to spend £35 billion. Apparently, it does not need to finance that from raising more tax.

Mrs. Beckett: Is the Minister aware that he has just admitted that under this Government there has been a trade-off between income tax cuts and increases in VAT? If we take the Prime Minister's words at face value—that the Conserservative party will not raise the rate of VAT

—does the hon. Gentleman recall an interview given recently by the Chief Secretary, when he was asked about extending coverage of VAT to transport fares? He said:

"nobody knows what is waiting round the corner."

The Chief Secretary then sought to imply that the Government might in some way be forced by the EC to extend the coverage of VAT.

Is the Minister aware that last week in Brussels Madame Scrivener, the relevant Commissioner, assured me that there was no question of our being forced by the European Community to extend the coverage of VAT, and that we cannot be forced so to do? Does he think that his right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary was hinting that the Government might choose to extend VAT?

Mr. Maples: This is quite extraordinary. No one could have fought harder than this Government to maintain the zero rates that we have. We have secured the right to do that. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that we have no intention of raising the rate of VAT either before or after the election. As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), we do not need to raise taxes; the Labour party does. How do the Opposition think they are going to finance £35 billion of extra spending without raising taxes on ordinary people? They cannot do it.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend reminds the House of the 25 per cent. rate under the last Labour Government and mentions that it was a tax on luxuries. Will he confirm that those luxuries included televisions; and does he agree that if there is not to be an income tax rate of 35p to support those massive spending plans, they can be supported only by a large increase in VAT?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend is, of course, right. There has to be a substantial increase either in income tax or in VAT to pay for the Labour party's spending plans. My hon. Friend does well to remind us that when the Labour party was last in office its idea of luxuries included petrol as well as televisions and caravans.

Environmental Policies

4. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in favour of taxation policies to benefit the environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: We have received a number of representations on this subject also.

Mr. Hughes: Given that investment in cavity wall insulation, in energy-efficient boilers and in heating controls has dropped by 50 per cent. since 1987, given that even double-glazing salesmen appear to have gone quiet in this recession and given that energy-efficiency investment not only helps the environment but protects the vulnerable and the old and creates hundreds of thousands of jobs, will the Government consider extending the exemption from stamp duty for all energy-efficient homes beyond August and perhaps indefinitely?

Mr. Maude: I shall certainly listen carefully to what is said on that matter and give it full consideration. The hon. Gentleman seems to leave out of account the fact that investment in energy efficiency is desirable for its own sake. Saving energy saves on cost, so there is already a built-in incentive for people to make prudent investments in energy-efficiency measures.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my hon. Friend confirm that one of the representations that he must have received was that from the Liberal Democrats advocating their policy of imposing an extra 50p a gallon on petrol? Does my hon. Friend agree that those who live in rural areas ought to know that that is what the Liberal Democrats have in mind? Does he agree that that policy would have a devastating impact on people who live in the country areas of Teignbridge?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend does a sterling service in drawing attention to that Liberal Democrat policy. I wonder, with him, whether the Liberal Democrats will be quite as keen on promoting that policy in rural areas in the coming general election.

Value Added Tax

5. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the amounts of Exchequer revenue raised from value added tax in each of the years 1978-79, 1986-87 and 1990-91; and indicate what percentage of total Exchequer revenue raised in each of these years these figures constituted.

Mr. Maples: In 1978-79, £5·2 billion and 9 per cent.; in 1986-87, £22·2 billion and 15·1 per cent.; and in 1990-91, £32·5 billion and 15·8 per cent.

Mr. Wareing: I thank the Minister for that answer and the confirmation that during the Government's tenure the burden has been placed firmly on the shoulders of those who are least able to bear it. Will the hon. Gentleman give a categorical assurance that if, unfortunately, the Conservatives are returned to power in a general election, value added tax will not be extended to any of the goods or services upon which it is not already levied? May I have a simple answer, yes or no, and no shenanigans?

Mr. Maples: It simply is not true that the burden of taxation has been increased on the poorer members of society. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] That was the subject of the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. Living standards at all income levels improved over that period. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] The hon. Gentleman asked about three questions and I shall choose which one to answer. I think that most people are interested in the fact that living standards under this Government have risen dramatically.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it perfectly clear that we have no intention of increasing VAT. We have made our plans on spending and tax perfectly clear. We do not need to raise VAT and in the European Community we have fought harder than anyone could have done to maintain our zero rate. We do not need any clarification about that. We need clarification from the Opposition about what their tax burden will be.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Has my hon. Friend heard the call from the many people who run village halls about the burden that VAT imposes on their activities?

Mr. Maples: I hear my hon. Friend's Budget representation and will take it into account.

Mr. John D. Taylor: How can the Government give an assurance that there will be no change in VAT rates when, under the Single European Act, the Government have already committed themselves to a policy of convergence of VAT rates throughout the European Community?

Mr. Maples: Any change in fiscal measures has to be agreed by unanimous vote in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will my hon. Friend make it clear that, according to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, VAT is progressive in its impact, given that the more people spend, the more tax they pay? May we therefore put the Government's tax policy into context: although we do not wish to raise VAT above its present level, what we have done reflects further taxation on those who can afford to spend more?

Mr. Maples: Of course, my hon. Friend is quite right. The more one spends, the more one pays in VAT. It must amaze my hon. Friend, as it amazes me, that we have to explain that to the Opposition.

Dr. Marek: Does the Minister agree that his initial answer, taken with the huge increases that his Administration have brought about in national insurance contributions, the poll tax and the burden of rates that business men and business women have to pay, makes it clear that his party is the tax, tax and tax again party? Will he confirm that the proportion of national income taken in tax rose from 34·75 per cent. in 1978-79 to 37 per cent. in 1991-92? Has the Minister any plans to lower the total burden of taxation on the people of this country, which reached its highest levels in the 1980s after the very much lower levels that we experienced under Labour in the 1970s?

Mr. Maples: It is extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman wants to discuss this part of his party's history. The tax burden under this Government rose during our first two and a half years because we inherited at the top of the business cycle a borrowing requirement of 5·5 per cent. of gross domestic product. For every year since 1981, the tax burden has fallen. It will continue to fall this year and next year and I think that it is well known to everybody that this Government's policy is to lower taxes, in contrast with the plans of the hon. Gentleman's party. We know that it plans to spend £35 billion. We should like to know how Labour plans to raise that.

Mr. Wareing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the Minister's answer to the question on the extension of VAT, I intend to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Income Tax

6. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on total tax revenues of the changes in the higher rate of income tax since 1979.

10. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on total tax revenues of changes in the higher rate of income tax.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): The top 5 per cent. of taxpayers pay 32 per cent. of the total yield of income tax, compared with 24 per cent. in 1978-79.

Mr. Haselhurst: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures strikingly demonstrate that lower, rather than higher, tax rates are at once a fairer and more effective way to maximise revenue to sustain improvement in important public services?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We inherited a situation in which there were penal rates of taxation, which we reduced. The effect was to increase revenue. The Opposition seem anxious to repeat the mistakes that they made before. They want to increase tax rates again. The whole country would like to know at what level of income they intend to increase the higher rate of tax. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) says that it will be at £36,000, but the right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) will not tell us and says that he does not think that it is necessary to say so.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that any proposal to raise the higher rate of income tax, as advocated by the Opposition, would be damaging for morale and prosperity, because such a move would not only destroy the will to work but drive some of our best brains out of the country? We Conservatives do not want that. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we shall always be the party of lower taxes and the Opposition that of higher taxes?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend makes a good point. In addition to her arguments, I believe that the low rate of top rate tax is also an incentive to bring inward investment into the country. It is very much appreciated and gives us a competitive advantage.

Mr. Madden: Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer realise that ability to pay must be the underlying and fundamental principle of any fair taxation policy?

Mr. Lamont: I do indeed, and we have a progressive system. What the hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand is that one can have a progressive system with two rates.

Mr. Rooney: Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer recognise that 2,700,000 people out there would welcome the opportunity to pay any income tax?

Mr. Lamont: What the hon. Gentleman does not answer is this question: by putting up——

Mr. Rooney: Answer the question.

Mr. Lamont: The point that the hon. Gentleman will not face up to is this——

Mr. Rooney: Answer the question.

Mr. Lamont: The point implicit in the hon. Gentleman's question is: what is the point of putting up the top rate of tax if one raises less revenue? What good does that do the poor of this country?

7. Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much income tax was paid by an average family with two children in 1979 and 1991, at constant prices.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Income tax has been reduced from 14·5 per cent. of such a family's gross income in 1978-79 to 13 per cent. in 1991-92.

Mr. Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is no longer funny.

Mr. Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reductions in personal taxation have played a major role in the revival of enterprise and the increase in risk taking, productivity and output that we have achieved in the past decade? Does he agree that reductions in personal taxation are a highly efficacious means of stimulating simultaneously the demand and the supply sides of the economy?

Mr. Lamont: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The benefits of income tax cuts have been widely appreciated. The last thing that the country needs at this moment are the sort of enormous tax increases being advocated covertly by the Opposition—the tax increases implied by their sky-scraping public spending plans.

Mr. Ron Brown: Has not national taxation increased with higher levels of VAT and the introduction of poll tax? Is not it disgraceful that the Government are destroying living standards, yet they claim to believe in human values? Is not it also true that the Prime Minister claimed that he was concerned about third-world debt? As this country is also a third-world country, suffering a Tory Government, what is he going to do about that?

Mr. Lamont: I have long thought that the hon. Gentleman imagined that we were living in Ethiopia, having listened to some of his speeches about the economy. Equally fanciful is his assertion that we are destroying living standards. How he can use that phrase when living standards for a married man on average earnings with two children have risen by about 35 per cent. after increases in VAT and increases in the cost of living, I do not know. The answer lies in the real increase in take-home pay.

Taxes (Abolition)

8. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxes have been abolished since 1979; and if he will list them.

Mr. Mellor: We have abolished six taxes—investment income surcharge, national insurance surcharge, development land tax, the tax on lifetime gifts, capital duty and composite rate tax. We plan to abolish a seventh—stamp duty on shares.

Mr. Cran: Has not my right hon. and learned Friend conclusively convinced the House that only a Conservative Government have the courage to reduce taxation on the one hand and to get rid of taxes on the other, in contradistinction to nearly all other Governments before them, and especially the one between 1974 and 1979 who found endless ways of leaching money out of other people's pockets? How many new taxes would the Opposition introduce if they were in government?

Mr. Mellor: We know that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) proposes a number of additions to existing taxation and a number of new taxes, including the reappearance of investment income surcharge. I return to the question that we shall level continually at the Labour party: what is the basis for thinking that there is any answer to the country's problems through increasing the burden of taxation?

Mr. Ashton: How many welfare benefits have been cut and how many freezes have been imposed to pay for taxation cuts?

Mr. Mellor: On the contrary, the level of benefits paid has never been higher. It has risen sharply in real terms, as the hon. Gentleman knows only too well.

Mr. Allason: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the abolition of composite rate tax. Is he aware that the 0800 free number is of enormous benefit, especially to pensioners who have had tax deducted from their gross income from their investments in banks and building societies? Has he any plans to extend the free 0800 number to other taxes which could be reclaimed by pensioners and others?

Mr. Mellor: I have no announcement to make on that matter at this stage, but I shall bear in mind the representation that my hon. Friend has made.

Mr. Skinner: If all those taxes have been abolished since 1979, why is it that the average family, starting out in 1979 with a debt of 45 per cent. of income after tax and insurance, reached the end of 1991 with a debt of 102 per cent? The abolition of those taxes has not done the average family any good, has it, or those at Lloyd's?

Mr. Mellor: During the lifetime of this Government the average family the hon. Gentleman talks about has had increases in disposable income of unprecedented levels, in excess of £50 per week, while the hon. Gentleman well knows that from 1974 to 1979 their standard of living bumped along without showing any significant increase.

Family Income

11. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average family income in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1991 in real terms.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The real net income of a married couple on average male earnings with two children has increased from £194 in 1978-79 to £262 in 1991-92—a rise of 35 per cent.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that huge increase in real income clearly demonstrates the overall success of Conservative policies and would not have come about without the tax cuts that all families have experienced? Would it not be a disaster if families in my constituency in Leicestershire and throughout the country faced the huge tax increases proposed by Labour and the Liberals?

Mr. Lamont: It remains the situation that if we had not altered the income tax regime that we inherited when we came to office, and if we had merely indexed the rates and allowances, the average family would be paying £1,200 more in income tax. That is what it would be paying under the previous regime of the last Labour Government.

Mr. John Smith: What about value added tax?

Mr. Lamont: I may inform the right hon. and learned Gentleman that a single man on average earnings in 1978-79 was paying 42½ per cent. of his income away in income tax, national insurance contributions, and VAT. Today the proportion is 40½ per cent.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Chancellor comment on the recently published "Social Trends", which shows that the income of the richest one fifth increased by more than 50 per cent. as an overall proportion, whereas the bottom 60 per cent. saw their proportion of income fall relative to that top one fifth? As most average families are in the bottom 60 per cent., does not that show that the Government have given money to the rich at the expense of ordinary families?

Mr. Lamont: A person on half average male earnings —a married man with two children—has seen his after-tax, post-inflation income rise some 28 per cent. That is the increase in real take-home pay for someone on half average earnings. The hon. Gentleman does a valuable service by reminding us that Labour is committed to a policy of heavy redistributive taxation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend informed us that the previous tax rates would have cost each family an extra £1,200. Perhaps I may turn briefly to the higher rates, which may be in the minds of some, and ask whether it would be possible to picket Park lane, to ask those attending this evening's £500 per head dinner whether they are paying more tax this year at the lower rate, or whether they paid more tax in 1979 at Labour's higher rates?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It is utterly baffling why Labour wants to pursue a policy that is likely to raise less revenue and do less good for everybody.

North Sea Oil

12. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cumulative total of all taxes from North sea oil has been since 1979 in 1991-92 prices.

Mr. Maples: Around £109 billion.

Mr. Eadie: Is the Minister aware that the Government have just announced that they have achieved a financial bonanza that no previous Government in history have enjoyed? Bearing in mind the millions of pounds that the Government raised from privatisations—the selling of the family silver—and all the money that has been raked into the Treasury, should not the Economic Secretary stand at the Dispatch Box and apologise for the economic mess in which the Government have landed this country?

Mr. Maples: The revenues from North sea oil and privatisations helped this Government to restore public finances to the kind of good shape that those of few other countries are in. Ours is one of the few countries in the European Community that would meet those aspects of the stage 3 European monetary union standards. Under the last Government, debt rose to unprecedented levels, which was essentially postponed taxation on future generations. We reduced those debt levels. They have gone in reducing overseas debt inherited from the——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Where has the money gone?

Mr. Maples: I am telling you—listen.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister ought to rephrase that remark.

Mr. Maples: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I am telling the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) where the money has gone. It has gone in repaying the overseas debt that we inherited from the last Labour Government. It has gone on reducing the fantastic levels of public sector borrowing requirement that were reached under the last Government. It has gone on reducing income tax from the levels of 83 and 98 per cent. that were reached under the last Government. We think that that was a good investment.

Mr. Bill Walker: Welcome though North sea oil taxation revenues are, does my hon. Friend agree that they are not a large proportion of the taxes paid in the United Kingdom? Also, can he confirm that a separatist, socialist, nationalist Scotland could not expect to enjoy all those oil revenues?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend is right about the revenues from North sea oil taxation. This financial year, they are expected to be just over £1 billion—about one half of 1 per cent. of total tax revenues.

Manufacturing Output

14. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the most recent monthly figure for output in the manufacturing industry; and what is the comparable figure for the same month 18 years ago.

Mr. Mellor: The idex of manufacturing output was 111·2 in November 1991, the same level as 18 years earlier.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that this situation represents satisfactory progress over the last 18 years?

Mr. Mellor: The real test of what has happened has been the overall growth in gross domestic product, which has been very substantial. In so far as one concentrates on manufacturing output, the fall was in the earlier part of this period. Between the first half of 1974 and the first half of 1979, there was a fall in manufacturing output of 2½ per cent.; whereas from the end of the first half of 1979 to the third quarter of 1991, there has been an increase of nearly 6 per cent.

Ms. Armstrong: The complacency that the Chief Secretary has just demonstrated is way beyond anything that my constituents will understand. They have seen manufacturing industry absolutely devastated during the period of this Government. What do the Government intend to do not just to offer help to individuals but to give areas such as mine the opportunity to be again a fully participating part of this nation?

Mr. Mellor: With the greatest respect to the hon. Lady, perhaps she should read the Confederation of British Industry's recent publication, "Modern Manufacturing Strength". It is a fair assumption that the CBI knows at least as much about manufacturing as the hon. Lady does, and she will see a commendation of the Government's policy in the 1980s and a firm recommendation that it should continue.

Mr. Devlin: Is not the constituency of the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) in the middle of the area of the United Kingdom which gets the largest level of outside investment into this country and, indeed, into the European Community? Is not that new manufacturing capacity brought here by the Government's successes in promoting Britain and the north of England as a location for manufacturing?

Mr. Mellor: My hon. Friend has made an invaluable point. The fact that this country has recently received 50 per cent. of total inward investment by the United States and Japan in the European Community has made possible a diversified economic base, particularly in manufacturing in the north. This has enabled the north to weather this recession far better than any previous recessions and in a way that bears the best comparison with the south.

Mr. John Smith: As the Chief Secretary has no doubt noticed, the Government's figures today indicate yet a further fall in investment in the manufacturing sector. Given the horrendous job losses that have been announced this month in the manufacturing sector, are these signs of the success of the Government's economic policy?

Mr. Mellor: What those figures certainly reveal is that the real gains in investment in British business since 1979 have been sustained, so that even at the depth of this present recession investment is 40 per cent. higher in real terms than it was in 1979. That was the position last year and it is a sign of the real improvements in investment that have followed the policies of this Government.

Charter Mark

15. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on how the charter mark will operate.

Mr. Maude: Charter marks will be awarded each year to those organisations that have delivered service to the public to the highest standard at present available. They must be able to show measurable improvements in the quality of their services over the past two years, and customer satisfaction, and they must have in hand or plan to introduce at least one innovative enhancement to their services which entails no additional cost to the taxpayer or consumer.

Mr. Mitchell: Since the charter mark is designed to improve public services, does my hon. Friend agree that the attack launched today on the citizens charter by the National and Local Government Officers Association in a lavish newspaper advertising campaign is typical of that union's contempt for the consumer and lack of interest in improving public services?

Mr. Maude: What is depressing about that campaign is its spineless acceptance that nothing can be done to improve public services without throwing huge amounts of money at them. It would be interesting to hear whether the Labour party agrees with the view of that huge public sector trade union. Or does it accept that the only way to make things better is to lavish ever-greater sums of public money on the public services?

Gross Domestic Product

16. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to have available *(a)* information on the United Kingdom gross domestic product per head in 1991 and *(b)* comparable information for the other member states of the European Community.

Mr. Maples: October, when 1991 population figures for the United Kingdom and other EC countries will be available.

Mr. Morgan: May I draw the Economic Secretary's attention to a study that I have just received from the House of Commons Library's statistical section? According to the author's best estimates, the average gross domestic product per head in this country in 1991 was five percentage points behind that of Italy. Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that that means that the average family in this country would be approximately £2,000 better off if it lived in Italy? Is this yet another case of "Excuse the mess, we have got the Conservatives in"?

Mr. Maples: I told the hon. Gentleman that I could not give him the information for which he asked until October, when the 1991 population figures would become available. I can tell him, however, that over the 1980s GDP per head in this country rose at an average rate of nearly 2½ per cent. a year—faster than in Germany, France or Italy.

In 1974, Germany's GDP per head was 15 per cent. ahead of that of the United Kingdom; by 1979, after five years of Labour government, in was 19 per cent. ahead. In 1990, after 11 years of Conservative government, the gap had been closed to 16 per cent. If the hon. Gentleman examines measures of GDP per head and compares this country with France, Germany or Italy, he will find that the gap widened under the last Labour Government and has closed under the present Government.

Savings

17. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement of his policy on the level of savings.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Government aim to secure an appropriate climate in which people can plan sensibly for the future, making their own decisions about what to save and what to spend.

Mr. Oppenheim: Would not a policy of clobbering savers with an investment surcharge reduce savings and so reduce the pool of available investment capital for manufacturing industry? Do not such policies illustrate the fact that no amount of tacky red plastic roses, sharp suits or slick public relations can disguise how little Labour has really changed?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Labour Members talk all the time about the need for investment. Investment is financed out of saving and the last way in which the level of savings can possibly be increased is by the imposition of extra taxes on it.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Campbell: What advice has the Prime Minister for one of my constituents, Mrs. Logan, who lives in Camlinton new town and is in great pain with an arthritic hip? She has to climb the stairs with the aid of her husband and has to lie in bed in agony most nights. She has been told by the local hospital that she cannot have an appointment until June 1993. Is that the Prime Minister's way of keeping waiting lists low?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman will give me details of the particular case that he has mentioned, I will certainly have it examined. What he should acknowledge, however, is that spending is up by more than 50 per cent. in real terms, 25 per cent. more patients are treated, there are far more doctors and nurses, and they are far better paid, and treatments that were rare in 1979 are now commonplace. I wish that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues would stop running down the improvements that have been made in the national health service.

Mr. Aitken: On a constitutional point, does my right hon. Friend agree that if an assembly were set up in Scotland with responsibility for health, trade and industry, and taxation north of the border—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] In such circumstances, would not it be impossible thereafter for Members of Parliament with Scottish constituencies to sit in Departments as Ministers, administering those Departments—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Get it out, please.

Mr. Aitken: I know that this is painful. Would not it be impossible for Ministers to be in charge of Government Departments administering those matters for England and Wales? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be right to set up a retraining scheme for soon-to-be-redundant members of the shadow Cabinet?

Mr. Speaker: I think that that is enough.

The Prime Minister: I should be happy to add that training scheme to the many other excellent training schemes we have at present. The point that my hon. Friend has made was graphically illustrated by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who is reported as having said that if Labour were to introduce its devolution plans he could not act as Secretary of State for Health for England and Wales. Presumably the same principle would apply to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). I look forward to their confirming that. If the Labour party were then to show some affection for devolution in Wales, perhaps the same principle would apply to an even more eminent right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Kinnock *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition must have a chance to answer.

Mr. Kinnock: Not until we have a Question Time for the Leader of the Opposition, but within a couple of months I shall be answering from the Government side of the House.

Is the Prime Minister aware that in the 15 months since he got his job 840,000 people have lost their jobs? In this 22nd consecutive month of rising unemployment does he still cling to the pretence that the recovery has already started?

The Prime Minister: I accept that the unemployment figures this month are disappointing—no one can deny that—but what we are seeking to do is to put people back into permanent jobs, and not temporary jobs. That can be done only by putting in place the right conditions to create long-term, permanent jobs, long-term growth and secure jobs. That is why we have been working to reduce inflation—with success; to bring down interest rates—with success; and to cut direct tax rates—with success. Of those people who have lost their jobs, more than 250,000 are this year in well worth while and excellent training schemes. That is the right way to help people, it is the right way to achieve long-term prosperity for this country and it is the way in which we have been developing our policies.

Mr. Kinnock: For 2·6 million of our fellow citizens the unemployment figures are not disappointing—they are absolutely devastating. Why does the Prime Minister ignore the evidence of employers, who tell us that unless policies change 50,000 more jobs will go from construction, 40,000 from motor vehicles and textiles, with a further 70,000 manufacturing jobs going? Why does the Prime Minister ignore all that evidence? Why does he just sit there and do absolutely nothing to combat the recession that his policies have caused? After 22 months, does he not yet understand that sitting there crossing his fingers and closing his eyes will not bring recovery?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks of ignoring evidence. There is evidence, too, which he is ignoring. He has not acknowledged that more people are now moving out of unemployment than a year ago. Every month 300,000 people are leaving unemployment. The right hon. Gentleman quotes job losses, but he fails to mention Tesco's plans for 5,000 new jobs over the next year, Safeway's plans for 2,000 jobs, Nissan's plans for 600 new jobs in the north-east, and the fact that Toyota is providing another 3,000 jobs in Derbyshire. He also chooses to ignore the fact that this country has a higher proportion of its population in work than any other Community country except Denmark.

Mr. Kinnock: Under the Prime Minister's leadership, in the last 12 months alone more than 800,000 jobs have gone and during that period the number of people in employment in Britain has gone down by 800,000. The number of vacancies has fallen. Even the Chancellor confesses that the Government caused the recession. And they have continued it, and have let it get out of control. The Government are guilty on all counts.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend said no such thing, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about taking action, perhaps he will consider the action that he proposes to take in his policies: a minimum wage that will cost jobs, a payroll tax that will cost jobs, and a strikers charter that will create jobs—not here but in France, in Germany, in Belgium, in Italy, in the United States and elsewhere. Can the right hon. Gentleman explain how the costs of extending national insurance or raising taxation will help employment? None of that will help employment. The right hon. Gentleman's plans would spell disaster for this economy, disaster for companies and permanent unemployment for millions of people.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Does the Prime Minister accept that one of the great achievements of the Olympic movement is to bring nations together in sporting endeavour and excellence and that similarly, despite the forthcoming general election, all political parties are brought together to support this country's bid to host the Olympic games in the year 2000? Will my right hon. Friend agree to support fully the Manchester Olympic bid which will benefit not only the north-west of England, where most of the events will be staged, but our capital city and the rest of the country—in fact, the whole nation?

The Prime Minister: I met the Manchester Olympic bid committee some weeks ago when we discussed the proposed bid that Manchester wishes to make. I asked on that occasion for considerably more information. That is being provided and I look forward to meeting the bid committee again towards the end of this month.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister is right—the Government are not wholly to blame for this recession, but they are chiefly to blame. Does he realise that what the country now needs from him is hope, but all that it gets is complacency; that what the country needs from him is leadership, but all that it gets from him is excuses; that what the country now needs is a Government who will act, but what it has is a Government paralysed by the election who dodge the issues, duck the realities and do nothing?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for reprising his party political broadcast of last evening. It is a good sound bite, but it is not any better for hearing it the second time. What the right hon. Gentleman should bear in mind, if he cares about real prosperity for this country, is making sure that we get the economic basics of inflation and the exchange rate correct so that we can get sustainable investment for the long term, not the short-term gimmicks that the right hon. Gentleman embraces.

Sir Peter Hordern: Will my right hon. Friend tell Mr. Delors that the proposed increase in the United Kingdom contribution to the European budget is wholly unacceptable? Will he also tell him that the first priority must be to reform the common agricultural policy, to remove the losses from fraud which occur within that policy and, especially, to bring about a successful conclusion to the GATT negotiations?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend on each of the points that he makes. There is no justification whatever for an increase in the budget on anything like the scale that the Commissioner proposed. There is already scope for significantly increased expenditure within the existing own resources ceiling.

Q2. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Martlew: The Prime Minister will be aware that there is great anger and despair in the country at the announcement today that unemployment has moved up again. That is reflected in my constituency, where there are an extra 400 people unemployed in the Carlisle area, bringing the total to a staggering 4,000 unemployed. Bearing that in mind, will the Prime Minister take the opportunity today to condemn one of his Ministers who said yesterday that people who were losing their jobs were being "liberated"? Will he dissociate himself from that comment and will he take action today to see that the hon. Gentleman concerned is "liberated" from his ministerial duties? In other words, will he sack him?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman neglected to mention that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by nearly 20 per cent. since the last general election. My hon. Friend has made clear his regret at the job losses at British Aerospace. The hon. Gentleman simply trivialises the issue with his remarks.

Sir William Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that of the known policies of the Labour party—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Sir William Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if there were a minimum wage and also higher taxation both on individuals and on companies, that would kill inward investment and cause even more unemployment?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend about that. It is also the case that most independent commentators—Goldman Sachs, Credit Lyonnais, BZW, Phillips and Drew, Nomura, the CBI—agree that Labour would cause a rise in inflation, with all the impact that that would have on living standards, jobs and future prosperity.

Q3. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. O'Brien: In a radio programme, the Prime Minister told Sue Lawley, in response to a question on housing, that repossessions had stopped before Christmas. Will the Prime Minister now tell us whether he accepts that, in addition to the massive number of homes repossessed last year, a further 80,000 families are to lose their homes in the current year?

The Prime Minister: What I confirmed in answer to the question to which the hon. Gentleman has referred was that we had put in place measures to deal with the problems arising from repossession. Lenders have confirmed that they do not seek possession where the borrower has suffered a severe reduction in income support but is still making a regular and routine payment, nor will they repossess—which is the point that I was making—where income support is paid direct to them. I reiterate that point today.

Q4. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dykes: Further to the European Community budget proposals, which were proposed unanimously by all the Commissioners, including the two British Commissioners, will my right hon. Friend also agree that extra resources long term will be needed for redundant farmers—*[Interruption.]*—in east European countries, and for the cohesion fund, that there is no need for us to have the United Kingdom budget contribution undermined in any way by these proposals and that they are less in percentage terms annually than the last 10 years' increase in the EC budget?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend points to the fact that there is scope for significantly increased expenditure, perhaps for eastern Europe and the cohesion fund, as he says, but without the existing own resources ceiling, which is still underspent. There is at this stage no justification for the proposed increase suggested earlier this week.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): May we have the business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 17 FEBRUARY—Until about seven o'clock, motion to take note of memorandum relating to the European Economic area agreement between the EC and the states of the European Free Trade Association. Details will be given in the *Official Report.*

Timetable motion on the Local Government Bill *[Lords].*

Motion to take note of EC documents relating to agreements between the European Community and Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Details will be given in the *Official Report.*

TUESDAY 18 FEBRUARY—Debate on Industrial Relations on a Government motion.

Motion on the Additional Grant Report (England).

WEDNESDAY 19 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day (5th Allotted Day). There will be a debate described as "The Government's Responsibility for the Recession and Unemployment" on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 20 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Transport and Works Bill and the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill *[Lords].*

FRIDAY 21 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY—Motion on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order.

Proceedings on the Parliamentary Corporate Bodies Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet on Wednesday 19 February at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents as follows: European Standing Committee A will consider document No. 8918/91, relating to Community strategy to limit carbon dioxide emissions and to impose energy efficiency. European Standing Committee B will consider documents Nos. 10089/90 and 9490/91, relating to free movement of medicinal and products in the European Community.

[Relevant documents:
Monday 17 February
Floor of the House
Relevant European Community Documents

(a) Unnumbered	*European Economic Area*
(b) Unnumbered	*Association Agreements with Central and Eastern European States*
(c) 10561/91	*Trade with Central and Eastern European States*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 24-vii (1991-92)
(b) HC 24-iv (1991-92)
(c) HC 24-v (1991-92)

Wednesday 19 February
European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community Documents

8918/91	*Carbon dioxide Emissions and Energy Efficiency*

Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee HC 24-v (1991-92), HC 24-ix (1991-92) and HC-xi (1991-92)

European Standing Committee B
Relevant European Community Documents

(a) 10089/90	*Medicinal Products*
(b) 9490/91	*Medicinal Products*

Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 29-xxvi (1990-91)
(b) HC 24-vii (1991-92)]

Mr. Grocott: I cannot believe—I do not think that the House can either—that there will be yet another guillotine motion next week. That shows that the Government's business is in a complete shambles. We need to get the facts on the record, so will the Leader of the House confirm that this will be the Government's 36th guillotine motion? I shall repeat that: this will be the Government's 36th guillotine motion. That is more than twice as many as any previous Government have introduced, despite the Government's parliamentary majority of more than 100. We know that they cannot run the country, but one would have thought that they could run their own business.

It is time that the Leader of the House told us what the guillotine motions are all about. We all know that they are the Government's shambolic attempts to clear the decks for a general election on 9 April—provided that the Prime Minister does not lose his nerve, as he has done three times previously. We want an election on 9 April, and we should be happy to talk to the Leader of the House about facilitating business, which, of course, needs proper scrutiny. Why does the right hon. Gentleman not tell us what everyone knows—that there will be a quick-fix Budget on 10 March and a general election on 9 April?

It is high time that we had an explanation of another aspect of next week's business. In the light of today's appalling unemployment figures, to which the Prime Minister was quite incapable of giving a sensible response, will the Leader of the House confirm that the Government have not initiated a single debate on unemployment in their own time during this Parliament? I do not want to hear any nonsense about debates on the Budget and on the Queen's Speech. I am talking about a specific debate on the crisis that is causing anguish in millions of families. The Government do not think that crisis important enough to initiate their own debate on it—we are always the ones who have to do that. The Prime Minister cannot give an answer, but it is time that the Government did. They should give us a date for a debate on unemployment, and it should be next week.

Mr. MacGregor: On the hon. Gentleman's second point, the Government have had many debates on economic policy, which have much to do with unemployment. If the hon. Gentleman does not understand that the debate next Tuesday on industrial

[Mr. MacGregor]

relations is a debate on unemployment, and on the huge improvements that there have been on the employment scene—the number of days lost is at a record low—he does not understand employment issues. That is why the Opposition have advanced policies which would undoubtedly greatly exacerbate unemployment.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the timetable motion. There is now clear evidence of deliberate Opposition delays affecting the Local Government Bill. On Tuesday night, and overnight into Wednesday morning, there were considerable delays. More than 32 hours have been spent considering the Bill, many more hours will be spent on it.

The Bill is important. Many local authorities throughout the country are anxious for the Local Government Commission to be established so that it can get on with its job. When going round the country, I have had such requests from many areas. We are engaged on the sensible management of Government business, and we are ensuring that priority Bills have every opportunity to be passed in this Session.

I note that hon. Members on both sides of the House now call for timetables on all Government Bills—*[Interruption.]* Not everyone in the House agrees, but there has been a wide range of requests for such action. We must await the conclusion of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), but I hope that in future we shall be able to timetable more Bills from the outset so that we do not have long delays considering their early provisions while the later parts are not properly considered.

Mr. Speaker: May I make the plea that I made last week and, I think, even the week before? The object of business questions is to ask about business next week. I ask right hon. and hon. Members to confine their questions to that and not to make electioneering points. There will be other opportunities for that.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): Has my right hon. Friend seen the front pages of this morning's *Daily Express* or this afternoon's *Evening Standard*? Will he confirm that there is nothing in next week's business which is of such importance that it will prevent a statement being made to the House, either by Ministers or by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, about the circumstances in which papers appear to have been stolen from the Department of Health and passed to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), and about the hon. Gentleman's involvement in those matters?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot make an announcement now about statements next week. I agree that it is a serious matter and deserves a clear announcement, whether it is in this House or elsewhere, about the Opposition's position. There is widespread concern about leaked or purloined documents. I believe that the official authorities have now detected the source of one leak. I hope that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who has been publishing the documents, will now recognise that he is responsible for causing difficulties for the individual who has leaked them. It is the wrong thing to do and is wholly misleading about the position in the national health service. It is a cloak for the Opposition's complete absence of policy on the health service.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Will the Leader of the House accept that the Prime Minister's response and his response today will be cold comfort to unemployed people? Cannot unemployed people justifiably expect that next week, in view of the figures, the Government will give time for a debate on unemployment?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already said that there will be a debate on industrial relations, in which all employment matters can be raised. I reiterate that, of course, we regret the increase in unemployment and we very much regret the situation that people face as a result of unemployment. The hon. Gentleman knows, as so many industries tell us, that the problem is that there is worldwide recession and that the same trends can be seen in many other parts of the country. It is crucial that we continue to pursue policies to ensure, as will happen, that as the recession clears Britain has one of the most competitive economies to take advantage of that.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the teachers' pay settlement that was announced this week has serious implications for local authority finance, both nationally and in Shropshire? Is there a possibility of the matter being debated under any of the items of business which he has announced for next week?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I am glad to confirm to my right hon. Friend that, as he knows, the Government are making available a further £60 million to deal with the review body's award. The matter will be debated on the motion entitled "Additional Grant Report (England)" next week. The additional grant is required entirely for that purpose.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we please have an early debate on road safety, especially as it affects children, both as pedestrians and in cars? Three days ago, 10-year-old Yvette Barr was killed on one of the awful roads in my constituency that hack through so many of the great estates in our constituencies. Surely the House should consider how children can be kept safe. More and more children and young people are being maimed or killed because they sit in the centre of the rear of cars, which have dangerous lap seat belts instead of crossed three-point seat belts. Surely we should not have to wait for the EC to act or to initiate debate on the matter. The House should consider that danger without delay.

Mr. MacGregor: I very much regret the death of the constituent to whom the hon. and learned Gentleman referred, as one regrets any such road accidents. However, the hon. and learned Gentleman will know that we have pursued many road safety measures, including some in built-up areas such as the one that he described. We are constantly pursuing road safety education and other matters under the national curriculum and in other ways.

I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will agree that central lap belts are an improvement on travelling unrestrained. A three-point belt provides better safety, but it is technically difficult to fit them to the centre rear seats of many cars.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the debate on the timetable motion for the Local Government Bill gives us plenty of time to debate why the motion has become necessary and, in particular, to examine the *Hansard* report of the Committee? The Committee has been treated to enormously long speeches, including one that lasted an hour and a quarter by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). The speeches were completely empty and showed that the Labour party has no strategy on local government other than wasting hon. Members' time and throwing buckets of money at its problems. Labour Members will not tell us where that money will come from. Their conduct is a disgrace and people should understand that.

Mr. MacGregor: I assure my hon. Friend that there will be plenty of opportunity in the timetable motion debate to raise those matters. It is becoming clear from the evidence that has been given to the Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) that restrictions on the length of speeches are necessary and that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have asked for them. They are necessary not just in the period in which we now have them. Many points may be made effectively in a short time. The timetabling of Bills has become necessary to avoid the situation to which my hon. Friend refers and to ensure more effective consideration of Bills.

It is notable that the Local Government Bill, which we shall debate on Monday, contains several measures relating to a citizens charter to improve local services and to ensure better value for money. That is one of the reasons why we are anxious to get the Bill on the statute book.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Hugh McCartney.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope the hon. Gentleman's father is better.

Mr. McCartney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I, for the next 20 minutes or so, advise you exactly about what went on in the Committee? The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) is telling porky-pies, as is his wont on such matters. There have been no delaying tactics from the Opposition. Since the Bill entered Committee, there has been only one full day of debate because the Government, on numerous occasions, have curtailed debate. On one occasion, they ended a whole session without debate so that the rate support grant settlement could be debated on the Floor of the House. The Government kept us up until 5 am the other morning—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] I do not object to that because one of the problems is that the Committee should be able to respond to the Bill. The Government are trying to curtail debate on major issues affecting local government services. They are afraid of proper debate on and scrutiny of the Bill so that we can see what is happening to local services as a result of privatisation.

Mr. MacGregor: I assure the hon. Gentleman that that is not the case. The Bill aims to ensure the efficient delivery of local services—it is one of many measures for that purpose. I understand that many Committee members now feel that deliberate and co-ordinated attempts have been made to halt progress. Hon. Members' speeches have contained much repetition and my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibilities for local government had to move the closure motion twice to ensure that proper consideration could be given to later clauses.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Has the Leader of the House taken note of the remarks made in the House yesterday about the conduct of business relating to the European Community? He and others seem to be trying to keep those matters of great importance from being debated properly in this assembly. Will he assure us that he will give time shortly so that the House can—at the proper time and before decisions are made in Europe—express its mind about the disgraceful suggestion of Mr. Delors that this country will have to pay for other countries that are, in parts, even better off than us? Parts of the Republic of Ireland, in particular, are now demanding £6 million a day, while Northern Ireland has been rejected for cohesion fund payments.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will know that yesterday's vote was in accordance with all the normal procedures of the House; the matter had been debated the week before, which is the normal way to proceed. As the House approved the resolution the week before that, we took an automatic and normal vote on the issue yesterday. There is nothing strange about that.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made the Government's position on the Delors programme clear, both inside and outside the House. There is no doubt about where the Government stand on that.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I raise a matter of some urgency for next week's business. If the general election is called for 9 April, the last date when people can register on the electoral roll will be next Thursday. The new registers will become publicly available from next Sunday. Existing electoral registers show that 1·4 million people are missing from them in England, Scotland and Wales.

On Monday, will the Government publish the figures for the registers, constituency by constituency, so that we are aware of the current position? May we have a statement, or a debate in the House, on the issue, as we are approaching the election with crooked electoral registers?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows that his remarks about crooked registers are completely untrue and unfair. He has raised the matter before and he knows that electoral registration has been declining since before the introduction of the community charge. There is no specific evidence to suggest that its introduction has had an adverse effect on registration. Indeed, the Government have gone to great lengths to make it clear that there is no connection between the two. Perhaps Labour Members who encouraged people not to pay the community charge led the public to think that there is a connection, but there is not.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): As the Prime Minister confirmed this week that about 180,000 teachers have learnt that they will earn more than £20,280 per annum, will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House reconsider next week's business to include a full-day debate on taxation so that Conservative Members can show their support for teachers being paid more, as the review body report, which was published this week, recommends? We would also be able to show that the Labour party's proposal would cut teachers' take-home pay by abolishing the upper limit on national insurance contributions.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I hope that it is not necessary to have a full-day debate to make that point time and time again. It is instructive and interesting to note that, even before the review body on teachers' pay made its recommendations and the Government accepted them, many teachers suffered considerable overall tax increases as a result of the Labour party's proposals for national insurance contributions. Those teachers are suffering even more now. It is significant that 180,000 teachers will come into that category, but I cannot promise a debate on taxation. My hon. Friend knows that there will be an opportunity for that before long.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When will we have a debate on Lloyd's? How much longer can we tolerate the scandals that emanate from Lloyd's month after month, with the result that we now know that some of its insiders have been lining their pockets to the tune of about £800,000? In that posh betting shop, some people are placing bets on less risky ventures, while giving the more excessive risks to those outside. If it were a working-class organisation, it would have secret ballots up to its earholes, but because it is an elitist organisation, close to the heart of the City and to the Tory party, it is allowed to regulate itself. It is high time that the Augean stables were cleaned out and the matter was dealt with properly by the law.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the issue of Lloyd's has been debated by the House in the not too distant past. It is a self-regulatory body under statute approved by the House. Any allegations of the sort that the hon. Gentleman has in mind—I have seen his early-day motion—are the responsibility of the Lloyd's authorities in the first instance. Any evidence of those allegations should be given to the Lloyd's authorities. My hon. Friend the Minister for Corporate Affairs has spoken to the chairman of Lloyd's, who agrees that the regulator must move as firmly and as swiftly as possible.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Will my right hon. Friend make time next week for a most important debate on a most important subject which is hardly ever debated here—immigration—given the recently published fact that in 1990 more than 250,000 people entered this country for settlement, the highest number since 1964? If this goes on, England will no longer be England.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate next week, although I recognise that this is a most important issue, not least because immigration issues in relation to economic migrants have been recently discussed in the House in debates on the Asylum Bill. I am keen to get on with the business of the House to ensure that if anything comes back to the House on this Bill we can deal with it while the House is in session. I therefore hope that my hon. Friend will agree that, by introducing that Bill, we are showing our concern about one particular aspect of immigration.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Before next week, will the Leader of the House have a word with the Secretary of State for Employment and ask him to make a statement on what the Government are going to do about policies that have resulted in the 22nd successive monthly rise in unemployment? Will he also ask him to comment on the junior Minister who said that those being made redundant by British Aerospace were being liberated? Or, on reflection, is it all due to the fact that the Government have been conducting a national liberation campaign to make people unemployed, with all the misery that unemployment brings?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have already referred to the hon. Gentleman's point. There will be plenty of opportunities to discuss employment and unemployment next week, and to discuss the policies that are most likely in the competitive world of the 1990s to ensure as many jobs as possible. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has noticed reports that Germany has 3 million unemployed people and that French unemployment is at record levels. I believe that the policies that we are pursuing will ensure that we are in a competitive state as the world recession clears.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Given the widespread interest in the demand by Mr. Delors for more spending in Europe, will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate to give the Government an opportunity to point out that this is an inevitable consequence of the move towards a single currency, and that as long as weak economies deny themselves the right to vary their exchange rates they are bound to ask for compensation in increased payments from what they call a regional fund, a cohesion fund or a convergence fund? By any other name, there will still have to be a massive transfer of wealth from the rich countries to the poor.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my hon. Friend will recognise that there will undoubtedly be opportunities before too long to discuss matters such as the Delors budget and the cohesion fund, but I am afraid that they will not arise next week.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week by the Secretary of State for Energy on electricity prices? Is he aware that one of the largest companies in Bradford is warning that further redundancies will have to be made if it is forced to pay 30 per cent. more for its contract electricity? Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for the Secretary of State to intervene immediately to stop the privatised electricity industry imposing excessive and exorbitant electricity prices? Will he also arrange for the matter to be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission so that this rip-off of manufacturing industry can be halted?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will know that there are already regulatory arrangements to deal with those issues and that, overall, there has been a reduction in real terms in electricity prices. He will also know that millions of consumers and small, medium-sized and other businesses have benefited greatly from that, and that there is some adjustment in the tariff structure for larger companies.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will the Leader of the House explain, when he is so obviously unable to allow time for a debate on important and urgent European matters, why on earth we are to have a three-hour debate on Monday on the European economic area when the agreement has already been vetoed by the European Court?

Mr. MacGregor: Because on that issue I think that matters are moving on, and because I have been asked by the Scrutiny Committee and the House to have the debate on the Floor of the House rather than in the European Standing Committee.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to a written answer on Thursday by a Northern Ireland Office Minister? The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) asked about physiotherapy services and the Minister directed him to refer the question to the chairman of the health and social services board. That was an inadequate and inappropriate response because the board is not an independent body—it is not even a quango—but is entirely a creature of the Minister. For the Minister to refuse to answer that question is wholly inadequate. Would it be possible to arrange a debate on the matter?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot comment on the question because I have not seen it. I shall certainly look at it. I suspect—and I repeat that I have not seen the question and hope that I am right—that it may be as a result of the changes that we have been making to deal with written questions in relation to next steps agencies. If that is not so, I shall certainly have a look at the matter.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the European Parliament has decided to ban tobacco advertising? Is he aware that 3,000 people are employed in the tobacco industry in Nottinghamshire, and that firms trading at the margins, such as corner shops and publishers of respectable magazines, will be at great risk if the ban is put into effect? May we have a debate on the matter, and one that is somewhat more than a 90-minute debate in the middle of the night at the instigation of European countries, many of which receive taxpayers' money to promote their tobacco interests and ban the advertising of tobacco products in their own countries? Should not we attend to that issue?

Mr. MacGregor: As I think my hon. Friend knows, there has been a debate on this in European Standing Committee B. The Government remain to be convinced that a total ban on tobacco advertising is necessary for the operation of the internal market. That is one of the key issues for the draft European Community directive.

The Government's policy on tobacco advertising is clear. My hon. Friend drew attention to some of the implications of an advertising ban. I agree that the proposed action by the Community is totally illogical at a time when hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money is used to subsidise the tobacco industry in other parts of the Community. When I was the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I fought against that.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): What about the Leader of the House initiating a system of secondary statements, perhaps next week, so that hon. Members can recall Ministers to the Dispatch Box to correct statements that they made earlier, such as when the Prime Minister told us that he had solved the problem of the repossession of houses? A month later, we find that nothing has been done or achieved. Houses are still being repossessed, and the poor people of this country believe that they have been completely misled. Should not the Prime Minister return to the Dispatch Box and explain why it was necessary to mislead people in the first place?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already said today that we took action before Christmas, which has been debated in the House. For the hon. Gentleman to say that nothing has been done is totally misleading. The other place is passing the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill, which has been considered in this place. We have passed stamp duty legislation. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong to say that nothing has been done. He must also know that two building societies—I think that it may now be three—have announced specific plans. Before Christmas, they agreed on the arrangements and they have now worked them through and are implementing them. The hon. Gentleman will also know that a number of other building societies are already following the spirit of that agreement.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on local government in London? Is he aware that those councils with the worst record in rent arrears, those with the worst school results and those with the largest stock of unlet council houses are all Labour?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right, and that is a point that he could make on the Local Government Bill, because some of the clauses will empower the Audit Commission to make comparisons of performance and to ensure that the points that my hon. Friend makes are fully drawn to the attention of the local public.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Would it not be a useful enhancement of the position of Back Benchers if an early-day motion that had attracted 175 Back-Bench signatures from both sides of the House became a subject for debate in Government time on the Floor of the House? May I draw attention to early-day motion 503 on the Japanese slaughter of minke whales, which, by coincidence, has attracted 175 signatures from both sides of the House?

[That this House condemns the fact that Japanese whalers are slaughtering minke whales for spurious research purposes in the Antarctic Ocean; is outraged that Japan is still undermining the world-wide, indefinite ban on commercial whaling imposed by the International Whaling Commission in 1986; is appalled that Japan has slaughtered nearly 7,000 whales and over 100,000 dolphins and porpoises during the ban despite the repeated criticisms and recommendations of the International Whaling Commission and the entreaties of the international community; calls upon Her Majesty's Government to make the strongest possible protest to the Japanese Government demanding their full and immediate compliance with the indefinite commercial whaling moratorium; further demands an end to the slaughter of dolphins and porpoises in Japanese coastal waters and asks Her Majesty's Government to press for the permanent extension of the ban at this year's International Whaling Commission meeting in Glasgow.]

It is important that the House should have an opportunity to express its near-unanimous revulsion at the continuing slaughter of minke whales by the Japanese in the Antarctic and the slaughter of dolphins and porpoises. Prior to the International Whaling Commission meeting in Glasgow later this year, the House should have an opportunity to discuss that and next week would be a good time to start.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recognises that the Japanese Government are well aware of the concerns of the British Government, the House and the British people about Japanese whale and dolphin hunting practices. Through the International Whaling Commission, we have consistently opposed unjustified whaling for scientific purposes, and we shall continue to do so. There is no doubt about the stand that the British Government have consistently taken. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been strong in his approach to the matter.

Early-day motions are a means to enable the House to express its view. I have certainly noticed the large number of signatures to that early-day motion. I hope that that in itself will have its effect. The hon. Gentleman is being a little ingenious to suggest that early-day motions which attract a large number of signatures should then take up Government time. I can see how that practice could quickly be abused.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Would it be sensible to have a debate, if not next week certainly before this Parliament ends, on the civil service? In recent years, there have been an increasing number of cases of dishonesty, culminating in the current scandal at the Department of Health. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this goes beyond mere party politics? No matter which party is in power, the proper government of this country depends on Ministers being able to rely on the honesty of their officials.

Mr. MacGregor: And certainly, too, being able to rely on the knowledge that there will not be deliberate leaks and things of that sort, which I think that my hon. Friend has in mind. I believe that it is widely condemned that documents are leaked and that clear use is then made of them when at the same time there are complaints about leaks from other sources. I agree with my hon. Friend but, as far as I understand it, the appropriate action has been taken by the appropriate authorities in that case.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to come to the House next week to make a statement arising out of the information given by top doctors yesterday to the Select Committee on Health? They are being forced into the position—arising out of implementating Government policy on waiting lists—of having to carry out minor operations and delay major operations, which could end up costing lives. Surely all hon. Members in the House want the truth. We would like the Secretary of State for Health to come here and clear up this matter.

Mr. MacGregor: We have been having a great number of debates about the health service, in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been making the position clear. As far as Select Committee reports are concerned, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the practice is for the Select Committee first to make its report, and the Government then make their response.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): In the light of the horrific level of terrorist violence in Northern Ireland, a bomb being placed in Whitehall this week and IRA demonstrations on the streets of London, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the business that he has announced for Monday 24 February will allow a wide-ranging debate on the prevention of terrorism? If that is not the position, will he provide sufficient time for such a debate to take place?

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad to be able to tell my hon. Friend that the business for Monday will allow for such matters to be raised.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Bearing in mind the fact that it was this Government who specifically excluded Lloyd's from the provisions of the Financial Services Act 1986, is not the Leader of the House duty bound to provide time for a debate on naked greed, dishonesty and fraud at Lloyd's, and how best to protect the names from the machinations of corrupt insiders?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made it clear where the allegations should go in the first place. If there are allegations of criminal activity, those are matters for the police authorities and the Serious Fraud Office.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): Will my right hon. Friend look again at his response to the question about the Select Committee on Health, of which I am a member? Those who gave evidence were not certain of what they were saying about pressure on waiting lists. They said that they thought that there was pressure; they were not certain about it.

Mr. MacGregor: That shows the difficulties of responding to a demand for a statement on a matter that a Select Committee is considering thoroughly in the round, and why it is important to wait until the Select Committee reports.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Fortunately, the Select Committee will print its evidence. At that stage the House can make up its mind whether what the hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) says is true.

The Government intend yet again to tax the sick by raising prescription charges from £3·40 to £3·75. Is it not time that we had a debate on how we exempt from charges those who are just above income support level and those on invalidity benefit, who have to pay out an enormous amount from small incomes for prescriptions that they need every week? The same applies to the chronically sick and the mentally ill, who often cannot afford prescription charges. Instead of taxing the sick, is it not time that we debated what is happening to those who we should be helping?

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, I hope that the hon. Lady will recognise that many people—doctors and others—working within the health service believe that the reforms are already having a beneficial effect.

I am glad that the hon. Lady has talked about prescription charges. Her remarks enable me to say that only one in six prescription items now has a prescription charge attached to it, whereas in 1979 it was one in three.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that on Wednesday, at the end of the debate on the recession, the Government's majority will apply and that the decision will endorse the comments that he made in response to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). I hope that he will check his response, because I am quite sure that it was not entirely accurate.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that some of the most important industries face crippling and insupportable increases in electricity prices, which have been imposed by people who have no interest in the national position, who have voted themselves obscenely large salary increases and who now threaten the very existence of industries which need to continue to export in the national interest? Can we not have a debate that is not disfigured by a Division, during which those who represent constituencies in which there are these important industries can reflect the urgent need to consider this issue, bearing in mind that these insupportable price increases are due to take effect on 1 April?

Mr. MacGregor: I repeat that, if we consider electricity prices overall, since privatisation there has been a reduction in real terms, from which many have benefited. There has been restructuring for some larger companies, and that is a matter for the regulatory authorities. The hon. Gentleman must find other ways of raising the matter than in a debate in Government time next week.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): As rumour has it—presumably through the usual channels—that today's main business has deliberately been made bipartisan so that Labour Members can go to a £500-a-head dinner tonight, it would be extremely helpful for Conservative Members to learn from my right hon. Friend when another of these dinners is taking place so that we can make arrangements to be in our constituencies working hard.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes his own point. I must in all fairness explain that today's Second Reading debate was not arranged for that reason. I think there is general agreement on the Bill—at least with the main Opposition party. Perhaps that is why few Labour Members will be present. I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to make his point about the fund-raising activities to which he referred.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): During next week's debate on employment and industrial relations, could particular emphasis be placed on the nuclear industry, the 120,000 jobs in the north-west that depend on it, and the effect on those jobs of any policy to phase out nuclear power—such as that suggested by Labour?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. The impact of Labour policies on employment in several other areas could also be highlighted.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Does the Leader of the House acknowledge the concern expressed in 10 early-day motions on the Shops Act 1950, and the necessity to change that legislation? If that cannot be achieved in the short time left to the present Government, at least a start should be made. The Leader of the House will have such opportunity to help ensure that next Friday, when my Bill, which is second on the list, could be debated.

If the right hon. Gentleman will use his influence to allow my Bill to go into Committee, a start could be made on changing a law that is the cause of much concern and distress. The present situation allows big business people to tear up contracts, compel workers to volunteer to work on Sunday on ordinary time, reduce double time and enhanced payments to staff employed for 20 years, and illegally open their shops. It is about time that the Government helped—if only by assisting a Back Bencher to promote a Bill that the Government should have introduced since 1986.

Mr. MacGregor: We have debated that issue many times previously, and I do not want to discuss it now—except to say that I am sure that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that right hon. and hon. Members hold many different views on Sunday trading. A private Member's Bill is not a matter for me, and I could not influence its progress. Any right hon. or hon. Member who wants to object to the Bill, for whatever reason—if it has not been fully debated—can do so. It is not within my power to stop that.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): May we have an early debate on the employment of people in the House? The scandal of leaked documents in the health service has already been mentioned, but it seems that the person accused of that action was recommended for secondment to the Department of Health by a man named Mr. Gordon Best, who I understand is the political assistant to a member of Labour's Front Bench. That is a serious matter in relation to the use of stolen material in the House, so may we have an early debate on that important issue?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend may want to pursue that matter in other ways. I cannot give Government time to debating it next week.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the House have an early opportunity to debate the subject of motion No. 33 in the notices of motions in today's Order Paper? In a week in which we are again dealing with terrorism, I am convinced that the establishment of a Select Committee to scrutinise the affairs of the Northern Ireland Office and the activities of Government-appointed bodies in Northern Ireland would be an answer to terrorism, and would deal with the problem to which my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) drew attention.

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that I have given a fair amount of time on the Floor of the House to Northern Ireland matters in recent weeks, and I continue to do so. The draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order will be before the House a week on Monday. We discussed before the suggestion for a Select Committee, and I explained why it would not be appropriate to act until there are further developments. There is the additional problem that only a few months remain of the life of this Parliament, and it is unlikely that we would be able to establish a Select Committee in that time.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Next Thursday we are to debate the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill. In the light of the shocking revelations that we have just heard about the research assistant to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), can my right hon. Friend tell me whether the hon. Member for Livingston will be able to use the opportunity of the debate on that Bill to apologise to the House about the disgraceful situation whereby he has been receiving stolen papers? Is it not an absolute disgrace, and should not this matter be explained here in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: My own view is that the hon. Gentleman has been running all these documents because

[Mr. MacGregor]

of the lack of credibility of the Opposition's health policy. We know very well that they would not spend any more money on the national health service. We know also——

Mr. Grocott: Let us check it with the voters.

Mr. MacGregor: No wonder the hon. Gentleman does not like this, because he is very embarrassed about it. We know very well that they would not spend any more money. We know that they have no proposals for proper reform of the health service. But, of course, it is a matter for the hon. Gentleman himself to decide what statements he wants to make.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): It will not have gone unnoticed by the House or those outside it that the Leader of the House did not take the opportunity, when answering the question by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), to deny that the Government have plans to raise prescription charges to £3·75 an item within the next few days. Will he therefore arrange not just for a written answer, if that be the case, but for an oral statement to the House, because that is what Opposition Front-Bench Members normally would have demanded?

The Secretary of State for Health should not just give us platitudes about how many items are free from prescription. He should explain why already millions of people in the country should have to pay 1,700 per cent. more for prescription charges than they did in 1979. The Secretary of State ought to come to the Dispatch Box and announce the abolition of this disgraceful charge.

Mr. MacGregor: That is an extraordinary thing for the hon. Gentleman to say, because his party introduced the charges, the Opposition have not committed themselves to abolition of the charges, and in 1979 there were far more items subject to prescription charges than there are now. It is not a platitude to point out that only one in six prescription items is subject to a charge, because it is a very clear indication of what the Government have done to protect all those in various categories who do not have to pay prescription charges at all. It shows the caring approach that we have taken in that respect. The hon. Gentleman will find that the announcement about prescription charges is being made this afternoon exactly as it always has been, by way of a written answer. The position is perfectly clear and, in the normal way, the regulations will be laid shortly and are subject to the negative resolution procedure.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): My right hon. Friend will be aware that there was grave disquiet on both sides of the House last week when the Government, late at night, in a debate lasting just an hour and a half, tried to slip past 450 million quid extra to the illegal budget of the European Community. That is not counting the additional money that was to go to the illegal budget under the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

Will my right hon. Friend agree to an urgent debate next week, taking account of the outrageous demands of Jacques Delors recently published? Can we next week have a full debate on exactly how many countries in Europe are net contributors to the European budget and whether it is simply Britain and Germany that are net contributors, with all the others having their hands in our pockets?

Mr. MacGregor: I can tell my hon. Friend straight away that there are three net contributors; France should be added to the two that he has mentioned. I think that that is fairly well known. Last week, we followed the normal practice, on top of a lot of debates that we have had on European Community budgets. I recognise that this is a most important matter—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made that very clear both this afternoon and in statements yesterday—but I think that it would be premature to debate the matter next week, not least because we have a lot of important business to do. There will be opportunities at the appropriate time, I have no doubt, to discuss these issues further.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Given that, in a few weeks' time, the right hon. and hon. Friends of the Leader of the House will be wall to wall in the north-west, and in the light of his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) about a debate on the national economy, may I ask the Leader of the House to consider arranging an economic debate about the north-west in the next few weeks?

The Bolton-Bury travel-to-work area, of which my constituency is part, has lost nearly 1,400 jobs since Christmas. Bury has the highest number of mortgage repossessions, and the 10 local authorities of Greater Manchester have been treated very badly in the poll tax arrangements for this year—the standard spending assessments and so forth. I think that that would be a very good subject for a debate that could be held before those Conservative Members start getting in my way in the north-west during the general election campaign.

Mr. MacGregor: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we look forward to debating the respective merits of the parties' policies as they affect the north-west whenever the time comes. When I have been in the north-west, as I have been a number of times recently, I have encountered considerable opposition to the Labour party's economic and tax and expenditure policies. We shall be checking that in due course.

Obviously, we shall be having debates on economic matters, but I cannot promise a debate on a specific region. The hon. Gentleman will have to find another way of securing a debate on the north-west.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the Leader of the House look at early-day motion 442, in my name?

[That this House recognises with sadness and anger that the latest transfers to flags of convenience by British shipowners, Andrew Weir and Blue Star, will take the number of United Kingdom-registered ships over 500 gross registered tons to under 300 for the first time since records were kept; regrets the loss of still more jobs for British officers and ratings; condemns the flagrant disregard for national interest inherent in the run-down of the Merchant Navy; recalls with respect the service given to this country, in times of peace and war, by a great industry which the Tories have now decided is dispensable; and looks forward to the election of a government which will act to defend and expand upon the pitifully small number of Red Ensigns which the Tory brand of patriotism has allowed to survive on the seaways of the world.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman also look at early-day motion 618? That motion is in the name of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton).

Both early-day motions draw attention to the fact that the United Kingdom-registered merchant fleet has now declined to fewer than 300 ships. Some of us find it very puzzling that a party that likes to cloak itself in the flag when that suits its purposes should display such consistent contempt for a flag that has served this country well—the red ensign.

Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate on the subject? Does he recognise that it is a disaster for a maritime, mercantile nation to be reduced to having a merchant fleet that contains virtually no oceangoing vessels, and is made up almost exclusively of coasters and ferries? Does he accept that one of the Government's prime legacies will be the virtual eradication of the British merchant navy?

Mr. MacGregor: I have seen the early-day motions. As the hon. Gentleman will know, in recent years the Government have introduced a range of measures, including some financial concessions, to address specific difficulties within the shipping industry. We certainly acknowledge the contribution by the British merchant fleet both to the economy and to our national defence. The Government are considering separately the special role that merchant shipping plays in defence.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have an early opportunity to debate the textile industry? As the Leader of the House knows, Bradford—like other cities—employs more than 12,000 people directly in the industry, which makes it a very important one. Nationally, more than 400,000 people are involved in clothing and textiles.

If a debate took place, we could make it clear that the textile industry must not be sacrificed on the altar of agriculture during the GATT talks, and that provision must be made to ensure that the industry is retained if the talks break down, as they are currently doing. We could also invoke a discussion about the outrageous and misplaced claims from the Common Market for an increased budget. If such a budget were granted—as the Prime Minister seemed to suggest this afternoon—it would mean money being siphoned off from the United Kingdom, and, potentially, a risk to United Kingdom textile industry jobs.

Mr. MacGregor: What my right hon. Friend was making clear was that there was already scope within the guidelines—the Community ceilings—for increased expenditure. He was addressing the point that the further increases proposed by Mr. Delors were unnecessary. Obviously, we shall debate that issue; I have made that clear several times this afternoon. As the Delors plan has only just been published, however, I am sure that we shall all want to study it further before debating it.

As for the textile industry, I very much hope—as I have often said, and I think every hon. Member feels the same—that we shall reach a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round talks on the GATT. It is vital that we do so. The hon. Gentleman will know, however, that temporary arrangements have been made for the continuation of the multi-fibre arrangement in regard to textiles for the current year to cover the fact that agreement has not yet been reached.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the dramatic increase in unemployment in Northern Ireland, which now stands at 105,000? Does he know that 14·5 per cent. of the work force are jobless, that almost one in five men are unemployed, and that more job losses in my constituency are to be announced soon? Will the debate that has been arranged for next Wednesday be sufficiently wide to take account of the impact of and the responsibility for the job losses and the lack of inward investment that terrorism causes for us all? Will he convey to the Prime Minister the fact that those twin problems—terrorism and unemployment—require that he put his own firm hands to them? Any efforts by the Prime Minister to resolve them will have our full support.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot say exactly what next week's motion will be; that is, of course, a matter for the Opposition. The hon. Gentleman has made a very fair point about the impact that terrorism has on inward investment. It is very noticeable indeed that, because of the very attractive economic conditions that we have created, Great Britain is a major Community beneficiary from inward investment. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows of the very high proportion of Japanese investment and of the fact that Great Britain is regarded as the best Community area for German investment. There is clear evidence that this is so. Whether the hon. Gentleman's very fair point about terrorism can be made in next week's debate I do not know, but it probably can.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I, for the third time, ask for a debate on Volvo of Sweden's asset-stripping operations in the United Kingdom? Is not it rather odd that Volvo will not tell the people of Workington the full truth about why it is closing the bus plant in Workington? Yesterday, I was able to establish that Volvo has received from London Transport an order worth £5 million. It has not made a public statement about the receipt of that order, as it knows that such a statement would unsettle the people of Workington, who are faced with extensive redundancy as a result of the closure of Europe's most modern bus plant.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot comment on the particular issue relating to Volvo, as that is a matter for the company itself. As I have said to the hon. Gentleman before, I cannot find specific Government time for a debate on this issue. It is for him to use the normal means of raising the matter.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Will the Leader of the House consider for next week a statement on the terrible accident at Monkwearmouth pit? Will he join me in congratulating the rescue services, the ambulance service, the hospitals and the doctors on the marvellous job they did?

Mr. MacGregor: I certainly express condolences to all those who have been affected, and I endorse what the hon. Gentleman has said. All that I have seen suggests that those services did an absolutely splendid job, as they always do in such situations. I am sure that the whole House agrees with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): As the Leader of the House knows, tax evasion is a growth industry for the rich in this country, and provides jobs for a whole host of

[Mr. Ron Brown]

accountants and lawyers, yet people who cannot pay the poll tax are repeatedly hounded in Scotland and gaoled in England and Wales. This is an absolute disgrace. Of course, the Government will maintain that people must pay their taxes. If that is the case, will the Government have a word with the monarch and the deadbeats of the royal family and ask them to pay their fair share?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member knows well that we do not refer in those terms to members of the royal family. I ask him to withdraw the word "deadbeats".

Mr. Brown: Hangers-on, the unemployed, unemployable people——

Mr. Speaker: I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the word "deadbeats"?

Mr. Brown: Under protest, I withdraw "deadbeats". I would like to find an equivalent Scots word.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): May I support the plea by the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) for a debate on industry in the north-west? Such a debate would give me an opportunity to point out that in the recent CBI survey business leaders and business managers in the north-west expressed confidence about the coming few months, and we would have a chance to prove the truth of the old adage that what Manchester thinks today the rest of the country thinks tomorrow.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is quite right to point out what business leaders have been saying, and I am sure that he will make the point admirably in the coming weeks and months.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Could my right hon. Friend urgently organise a debate next week on national health service trust hospitals? Would it be possible during that debate for all hon. Members to agree that the trusts have been extremely successful? Some members of the Labour party in my constituency are fearful for their jobs in these trust hospitals and know what a good job the trusts are doing—they want that fear removed in view of the remote possibility of us having a Labour Government.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is entirely right about national health service trust hospitals. The best way to remove that fear is to ensure that we do not have a Labour Government.

Amphibious Forces

4.35 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the Government's future plans for amphibious forces.

The White Paper, "Britain's Defence for the 90s", set out the changes in the size and shape of our armed forces as a consequence of the radical change in the world situation. It recognised the increasing importance, with lower force levels, of greater flexibility and mobility. It made it clear that the Royal Marines will retain their role as the principal infantry element in the amphibious forces and that we would be addressing the need for new specialist shipping and equipment that they require for their tasks.

These have three principal elements. First, there are the landing ships logistic which, by beach landing forces, vehicles and stores, played a significant part in the conflicts in the South Atlantic and the Gulf. We shall maintain five of these vessels. The House will recall that one of them, Sir Galahad, is a new ship constructed following the tragic loss of its predecessor in the Falklands, and that another, Sir Tristram, has been substantially rebuilt. We now intend to process a fundamental overhaul and re-equipment of the remaining three which will enable us to operate them well into the next century.

The second category are the Royal Marines principal transport and landing ships, Fearless and Intrepid. I can now tell the House that we have awarded contracts for project definition for replacements for these ships. These contracts have gone to YARD—the Yarrow Admiralty Research Department—in Glasgow, Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. in Barrow, and Dowty-Sema Limited in Esher. Two further study contracts are due to be placed shortly for critical aspects of their communications.

I turn now to the third element, the commando and helicopter-carrier ship. I can confirm that we are now proceeding to invite tenders for the design and build of a new helicopter carrier. This ship, which we have previously referred to as an aviation support ship, will be suitable for a variety of tasks in and out of area. Its primary role is to achieve the fastest delivery ashore of its entire embarked amphibious landing force.

These proposals in total amount to about £500 million and provide significant opportunities for our shipbuilding industry and the many other companies which contribute the equipments that will be incorporated in these ships.

My statement today forms part of our wider commitment to providing the Royal Navy with modern and capable equipment. The House will agree that this programme ensures that the Royal Navy in the 1990s and beyond will exemplify our intention to provide armed forces that are flexible, mobile and smaller but better equipped.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to look into a matter which is not too important? The Annunciator has carried a message all day saying that the subject of the statement was helicopter carriers, but the statement dealt with amphibious forces. I make no criticism whatever of the Minister as I am sure that he was unaware of the difference—as I was—but I wonder if it could be looked into.

Mr. Speaker: I think that I may be able to help. I was originally told that the statement was about amphibious forces, but that it was then changed to helicopter carriers. I think that is the misunderstanding, but I am assured that it is the same statement.

Mr. Boyes: Nevertheless, it puts us at some disadvantage.

Will the Minister accept that I welcome today's statement, as will many shipyard workers? It represents a step forward in the planned procurement of new amphibious forces. Labour's view is that we should maintain an amphibious capacity, including Royal Marine commandos and their specialist equipment.

I am sure that the Minister is aware of the concern of the Norwegian Government on this matter. Can he describe the changes made in his plans as a result of the changing nature of the threat?

Can the Minister confirm that invitations for tenders for a new aviation support ship were issued on 24 October 1988? On 1 May 1990 the Secretary of State told the Select Committee on Defence that there were some difficulties which needed to be resolved in relation to the aviation support ship. Will the Minister tell the House what those difficulties were and how they have been resolved?

Will the Minister also confirm that the Ministry of Defence is planning for the tenders to be returned in the autumn of this year and that final orders will be placed in the autumn of next year?

We welcome the overhaul of the landing ships logistic. Can the Minister state when the overhaul programme will start? We also welcome the awarding of contracts for project definition replacements for Fearless and Intrepid. We note the previous commitment by the Minister on 15 October to award these contracts last November. Can he say when he will now place the order?

Will the Minister accept Labour's total commitment to an amphibious capability? I am sure that the whole House will agree that it is a vital requirement for the proper level of defence, both for this country and to make our proper contribution to the defence of NATO.

Mr. Clark: I certainly welcome the hon. Gentleman's statement and his reiteration of his party's commitment to this important element in our overall service capability. I would not wish to appear ungracious, but I am curious as to how these various commitments on the part of the Labour party, which accumulate every time we debate this subject, can be reconciled with the decision of his party conference and the wish of the majority of members of the Labour party to cut defence expenditure by 27 per cent. I do not think, however, that this will ever be put to the test, so we shall remain in ignorance on this curious mathematical anomaly.

As for the reorientation of the operational duties of the amphibious forces, it is true that the urgency of the north Norway flank has diminished, but the Royal Marines have already shown their immense flexibility in all sorts of roles out of area, such as aid to the civil power, assistance with hurricane damage in Pakistan, assistance with Operation Haven in Turkey, and so on.

As to the order dates, I hope that we shall be in a position to order this in the autumn of next year, but that depends on a thorough scrutiny and evaluation of the tender process.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement which is an earnest of the statements that he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have been making for the past two years, that although our services are to become smaller they will be better equipped, and this will allow us to go forward over the next decade with superbly equipped troops, although fewer in number. Can my right hon. Friend say how many helicopters it is suggested should be on this ship, and whether it will be able to provide perhaps a company lift of marines, which would make realistic the getting ashore of a complete commando in a difficult scenario?

Will my right hon. Friend not be quite so shy about speculating as to how on earth the Labour party's welcome for a further £500 million expenditure sits with its determination to take £6 billion off? I know that it is an unlikely occurrence, but my right hon. Friend could put a little more thought into where the cuts would come—in other men, aeroplanes, tanks, or what?

Mr. Clark: I did not want to look a handsome gift horse in the mouth quite so flagrantly in my response to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), but I endorse everything that my hon. Friend has said.

As to the helicopter strength on the carrier, we expect that it will initially be equipped with 12 Sea Kings which will be able to land the first wave simultaneously. That will be a great enhancement of our amphibious capability. As my hon. Friend knows, until this point we would have had to bring a CVS, a proper aircraft carrier, close in-shore, with all the attendant risks. This means that there will now be a dedicated ship to fulfil this function.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): May I join in the general welcome of the announcement of the helicopter carrier and the enhanced flexibility and mobility that it will bring? Can the Minister say a little more about when it is planned that the helicopter carrier will come into service? In relation to the helicopters to be carried, the Minister will be aware that the Ministry of Defence contracts bulletin of 8 January refers not only to Sea Kings but to the EH101 as an alternative. Can he give the House a little more information about that alternative and when the matter is likely to be resolved?

Mr. Clark: I hope very much that this ship will be operational in the second half of the decade. I would not wish to be more precise than that at the present time because there is a great deal of detailed work still to go into it. As to the transition from Sea King to EH101, that again depends on the development of the 101 aircraft because the anti-submarine 101 is our first priority and it is for that type that initial orders have been placed.

Dame Janet Fookes (Plymouth, Drake): As a vociferous critic of the delays in replacing our amphibious craft, may I now warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on the news this afternoon, as it will indicate the very firm role that the Royal Marines will continue to play in our defences? May I also express the hope that this will

[Dame Janet Fookes]

be good news for Devonport dockyard which, in the fullness of time, will, I hope, be called upon to refit this craft?

Mr. Clark: I would not want to anticipate the refit programme for a vessel that has not yet been launched, but I echo everything that my hon. Friend has said about the Royal Marines. She and I share representation of the city where the Royal Marine Commando is based, and I feel sure that it will be widely welcomed there.

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): Will the Minister accept it from me that not everyone in the Labour party is opposed to spending important and valuable money on the defence of the nation? Some of us have been strongly consistent in this.

Will the Minister give some guidance to the House as to the thinking that brought this about? An exercise some years ago, when most of the territorial forces were moved from the United Kingdom to northern Germany, resulted in problems relating to moving men and equipment into the forward planning battle areas. The ships that had been hired were totally inadequate for the job. Has the lesson now been learnt that it is important to build these ships and also to have them manned by the Royal Navy so that we have the professionalism that is necessary should they ever be used?

Can the Minister give an assurance that Swan Hunter in Wallsend will be invited to tender—something that will be very welcome in the north-east—bearing in mind the valiant work that they did in rebuilding the Sir Tristram and the Sir Galahad?

Mr. Clark: Most certainly, I can confirm that Swan Hunter will be invit[illegible]er, and I very much hope that they will do so.

I would like to say also how much I personally welcome what the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) said at the beginning of his remarks. I take his point about transport, but that is a different issue from the specialised kind of vessel that we are talking about today. I mentioned earlier that we will end up with five completely refurbished or new LSLs, and that is a completely adequate strength to give a lift for beach landing capability. For heavy transport of vehicles and men, it has been found more economic and practical to take ships up from trade. This is a specialised vessel dedicated to a beach landing or an air-delivered strike of infantry from helicopters.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): Together with many other hon. Members, I warmly welcome what the Minister has said this afternoon—not least that Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. will be among those invited to tender for the aircraft support ship.

I wonder if I could possibly assist the Minister in response to the question put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates). I noted that the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) also welcomed the statement. I note that my right hon. Friend the Minister said that the overall cost will be £500 million. Conservative Members know, as do the general public, that the Government are committed to building the fourth Trident submarine. We know, too, that the Opposition are committed to cancelling it. The cost of the fourth Trident submarine will be £500 million. QED.

Mr. Speaker: That is a little wide of the statement.

Mr. Clark: The Opposition bring this kind of inquisition upon themselves. If we were to subtract every system, ship, store establishment and army system that they have already endorsed, and to which they have committed themselves, we find that, by implication, they are effectively scrapping everything else.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Presumably the replacements for Fearless and Intrepid will be ships of a similar capacity and type, and will serve with the aviation support vessel, making a total of three. Is it necessary to have all those? Surely the need could be met by one or two ships along the lines of the US Tarawa class.

With regard to the aviation support ship, the Minister will know that Harland and Wolff in Belfast recently successfully completed work on an aviation training ship. I hope that, consequently, Harland and Wolff will be among those invited to tender.

Mr. Clark: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but whether Harland and Wolff tender is a matter for the company. I reject the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the ships are not needed. I certainly would not want to downgrade to the standards of the second-line ships in the United States navy. The ships' predecessors, Intrepid and Fearless, served successfully for a long time, and played a key part in the last major military operation that the United Kingdom fought on its own.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Does the Minister agree that the next generation of ships will very much depend on the high technology on board? I am grateful to him for announcing that a company in my constituency, Dowty-Sema Limited, is at the forefront in the project. Dowty-Sema is probably the world leader in project definition. Its role in replacing and increasing the technological competence of our ships, especially assault ships, is welcome in Esher, and I am sure that it will be good news for the Royal Navy.

Mr. Clark: I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend has said. When I consider the list of subcontractors available to supply and tender for systems in the project, I am impressed by the sheer richness and diversity that British manufacturing industry can still offer.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this announcement is splendid news, both for the Royal Navy and for the country? Does it not prove that, unlike the Labour party, the Government are determined to maintain this country's defence capability in a world that continues to be uncertain and dangerous? The prospect of a £500 million order is most welcome in the shipyards of this country, especially Swan Hunter, with its splendid record of building carriers and amphibious ships. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a great prospect of work for that yard?

Mr. Clark: As I said to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), I look forward to a Swan Hunter tender. I am grateful for what has been said. We made the commitments in the original "Options" statement, and, although we cannot do everything at once, things are maturing precisely as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House that they would.

In round terms, the amphibious ships will be able to offer approximately 2,500 jobs each over three years, and I expect the helicopter carrier to offer approximately 1,500 jobs over the same period.

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): Like my hon. Friends, I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I should be grateful to know, in due course, whether my right hon. Friend thinks that the number of jobs that he has suggested may be somewhat conservative. I am sure that the defence industry, and all the contractors, will warmly welcome the work available from the contracts, as do many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Clark: That is a fundamental point. The figures that I mentioned involve only the workload and the jobs expectancy in the yards. Of course, there will be an immense initial spin-off in jobs in all the subcontracts which will provide systems such as gearboxes, communications, navigation aids, cabling, auxiliary propulsion and so on, on their own premises. I should think that, at the most conservative estimate, one could double the original jobs total.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Your task, Mr. Speaker, is being made easier by the fact that only one Back-Bench Labour Member has sought to ask a question on this crucial subject.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the announcement is good news for south Hampshire, for two reasons? First, local companies, including Vosper Thornycroft and GEC-Marconi, will be eligible to bid for part of the work. Secondly, the Government are keeping faith with the Royal Navy in providing it with the best equipment. That will ensure that, under the Conservative Government, the Royal Navy will continue to offer a first-class rewarding and stimulating career.

Mr. Clark: That is absolutely right. The Royal Navy will have much important work to do in the next 20 years, and I welcome my hon. Friend's endorsement of our determination to provide it with the best equipment for that task.

Yes, it is a pity that Labour Members, whose constituencies will undoubtedly be affected by the good news, have not seen fit to come to the House and welcome it. I fear that that betrays an insidious failing of the Labour party—I except the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) from this—in that it has a particular distaste for good news of any kind.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): My right hon. Friend will know that the Ministry of Defence and certain senior naval officers are keen on collocation. Has he given any thought to Dorset's bid to have a helicopter carrier ship based at Portland, next to the Portland helicopter repair facilities? It would be close to Bovington, for training, and Holton Heath, where the amphibious forces are now based. It would also be close to the wonderful shipyards at Portland, which would do all the regular maintenance on the equipment—and Dowty-Sema and other defence equipment manufacturers are right alongside. Surely my right hon. Friend can tell the House now that Portland will be the home base for this wonderful helicopter support ship.

Mr. Clark: I am full of admiration for the way in which my hon. Friend gets his claims in so early, and extols the virtues of his constituency in all its many aspects. However, I think that the House will forgive me if I feel that it would be premature to specify where a ship that has not yet been built is to be based.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): My right hon. Friend and some of my other hon. Friends have been speculating about how a future Labour Government might find the money to pay for a £500 million project. May I ask my right hon. Friend to speculate on an even more remote possibility—the election of a Liberal Democrat Government? How would such a Government pay for the project, in view of the Liberal Democrats' commitment to reduce our defence expenditure by 50 per cent.?

Mr. Clark: That is true. I am sorry that the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) did not digress on that subject. Using the rough rule-of-thumb calculation that I made earlier, when I subtracted the Labour party's total commitments to find out what was left, I should say that the Liberal Democrats have already overrun their overdraft ceiling.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware how welcome his statement will be in Scotland—first, because 45 Commando is based in Tayside and, secondly, because the Scottish shipbuilding industry has a major contribution to make.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that every vote cast for the socialist nationalists in Scotland will be a vote cast against the best interests of 45 Commando? No orders for ships would come to Scotland from the Ministry of Defence if the nationalists had their way.

Mr. Clark: I am afraid that that looks like the truth. In spite of the commitment made by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, I must in all candour tell him that if he ever had the chance, I do not think that he would be able to sustain it—the other members of his party would not allow him to do so. That fact is recognised by many people who work in the defence industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) should repeat in his constituency what he has just said.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I express my satisfaction that in the statement my right hon. Friend has redeemed the Government's declaration of intent in their White Paper "Britain's Defence for the 90s" to provide forces that are more mobile, more flexible and better equipped, and thereby better equipped to meet all eventualities in a highly unpredictable world? Will the three landing ships logistics, that are to be refurbished be out to tender for all the yards, namely, the naval constructors as well as the naval dockyards? Does that accord with the Government's policy for refits of Her Majesty's ships generally?

Mr. Clark: I am very glad to have the opportunity to confirm that. Although it is still some distance away, I regard that phase as being especially important in providing the full capability, as we undertook to do and on which my hon. Friend has congratulated us.

Mr. Boyes: I am greatly surprised by the criticism of the Labour party we have heard this afternoon because the Government have left such a big gap in our amphibious

[Mr. Boyes]

forces for so long. I remind the Minister and the Secretary of State of what the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) said on 31 March 1976. He told the House:

> "it is impossible for an Opposition to draw up a detailed and fully-costed defence policy when in Opposition. Such a process can be carried out only after full consultation with the Services, with our Allies and with industry."—[*Official Report*, 31 March 1976; Vol. 908, c. 1353.]

We will do just that in the next few weeks when we form the new Government.

Mr. Clark: There is nothing personal in the criticisms that I addressed to the hon. Gentleman. Our criticism is based on two factors. First—this is not a slight matter—only one Member of Parliament from a constituency that will benefit from the announcement has bothered to turn up and welcome it——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Two.

Mr. Clark: Two—I withdraw that comment. Not one, but two. Secondly, not one member of the shadow Cabinet has, to my knowledge, repudiated the repeated resolution and direction of the Labour party conference to cut defence spending by 27 per cent.

Department of Health (Leaks)

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance. You will recall that in business questions last week, I asked the Leader of the House whether it was possible to have a debate on the number of leaks coming out of the Department of Health and going straight to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). You will be aware that a Mr. Pashley has been caught as the mole and that a Mr. Graham Best, who is an adviser to the hon. Member for Livingston, is clearly implicated with Mr. Pashley. Have you received a request from the hon. Member for Livingston, as the shadow health spokesman, to make a personal statement bearing in mind his at least indirect implication in the crime?

Mr. Speaker: I heard that this matter was raised with the Leader of the House. I have received no such request from the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook).

Royal Assent

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

1. Consolidated Fund Act 1992
2. Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Act 1992
3. Severn Bridges Act 1992
4. Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992
5. Social Security Administration Act 1992
6. Social Security (Consequential Provisions) Act 1992
7. Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992
8. Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992
9. Social Security (Consequential Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Act 1992
10. British Railways Act 1992

BILL PRESENTED

COLD WEATHER CREDITS

Mr. John McFall, supported by Mr. Edward O'Hara, Mr. Nicol Stephen, Mr. William McKelvey, Ms. Alice Mahon, Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie, Mr. John Battle, Mr. Dennis Turner, Mr. Malcolm Bruce and Mrs. Irene Adams, presented a Bill to provide for credits to be paid from the National Insurance Fund to low income households during winter months to compensate for additional fuel consumption as a result of climatic conditions; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 February and to be printed. [Bill 77.]

Orders of the Day

Army Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Minister, I invite the House to look at the Bill and to see that it concerns the Ulster Defence Regiment being brought more fully into the Army by being merged with the Royal Irish Rangers. This is a narrow debate which is not connected to general Army matters such as "Options for Change".

5.4 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill concerns the future of a major element of the security forces in Northern Ireland. The House is all too well aware, especially perhaps from recent events, why we need to maintain and deploy forces on the present scale in that part of our country.

Our forces are deployed there simply because we are totally and absolutely committed—I think that I speak for the whole House—to preserving the rule of law throughout the United Kingdom. There is no other reason. The rule of law in a democracy such as ours means that all citizens should be able to go about their lawful business peacefully and without fear of violence. It means that the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland about their future, democratically expressed, must prevail. No act of terrorist violence can be allowed to shake the commitment of Parliament to those principles. It is essential, therefore, that we continue to maintain and deploy sufficient forces to protect the vast majority of peaceful and law-abiding people in Northern Ireland against the continuing threat of terrorism, whether from republican or loyalist groups.

The violence which the security forces seek to prevent cuts at the whole community of law-abiding citizens of both traditions in Northern Ireland. It may, as we have surely seen in recent weeks and all too often in recent years, leave another passer-by maimed, another wife widowed or another child orphaned. It may wreck another hotel, factory or shop, destroying jobs and discouraging the investment that is needed. All such violence leaves in its wake only tragedy and suffering. It will achieve nothing for any cause which the perpetrators may espouse.

All the security forces in Northern Ireland have a vital role to play in countering terrorism. Acts of terrorist violence, whatever their alleged political motive, are crimes. They must be treated as such. It is for the police to take the lead in dealing with crime. Clearly, however, for all its dedication and skill, the Royal Ulster Constabulary needs major support from the armed forces in its efforts to ensure that the terrorists will not succeed. For over 20 years now successive British Governments have committed a major part of our armed forces to Northern Ireland to support the RUC. That support will of course continue for as long as it is needed.

The role of the security forces is to prevent terrorist crimes from taking place, as far as possible, and when crimes have been committed, to seek out the perpetrators and deal with them in accordance with the law. That task makes heavy demands on all members of the security forces day in and day out. The highest standards of training and personal conduct are required—so, too, is courage in dealing with people who are ruthless. I pay tribute to the bravery which all members of the security forces so regularly display in Northern Ireland, often in ways that do not come to public notice at all.

There are three main elements to the forces that support the RUC. There are six regular infantry battalions serving on long tours of 30 months, and four on short six-month tours. There are then the support and specialist units, including Royal Navy vessels and helicopter support from the Royal Air Force as well as from the Army. There are, of course, the 6,000 or so men and women of the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The armed forces contribution amounts in total to about 17,000 service personnel actually deployed in Northern Ireland. The number of troops there is kept under constant review and we make adjustments to force levels as circumstances require. Since December 1990, we have deployed significant reinforcements on nine occasions, including the period running up to last Christmas, for example. Most recently, as the House will be aware, the second battalion of the Queen's Regiment has just been deployed to provide additional support to the existing forces.

The Ulster Defence Regiment continues to be a vital element in the security arrangements which I have just been describing. The House will recall that we announced last summer, in the Command Paper "Britain's Army for the 90s", our intention to bring the UDR more fully into the Army by merging it with the Royal Irish Rangers.

The Bill provides the necessary legal framework for that merger to take place. I should like to explain to the House something of our thinking about that merger. Several considerations led the Army to propose it, and the Government to endorse and support that proposal.

The UDR is the main focus of our attention today, but let me say a word first about the other partner to the merger. The conclusion was reached in the Army's restructuring exercise that, in the best interests of the Army [illegible] whole, the Royal Irish Rangers would give up one of their two battalions. I do not suppose that that conclusion was particularly welcome to them, any more than similar conclusions were welcome to other regiments.

The considerations affecting the UDR were, of course, rather different. The international changes that have dictated reductions elsewhere in the Army do not apply to counter-terrorist efforts in Northern Ireland. So long as the terrorist threat persists at its present level, we shall continue to need the services of the men and women—more than 10 per cent. of the total—who currently serve in the UDR, both part-time and full-time.

We expect to continue to need all those people to perform the varied tasks that they undertake at present: foot patrols, vehicle patrols, as well as some helicopter-borne operations; the operation of vehicle check points; searches; static guard duties; and quick reaction operations following terrorist attacks. The RUC and the rest of the Army could not sustain their current effort without the continuing involvement of the UDR in all those activities.

UDR duties can often be routine and uneventful, but in many cases the UDR has saved lives by deterring or preventing terrorist attacks, finding and seizing terrorist weapons and arresting suspected terrorists.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Will the Minister of State assure the House that in no sense is there a hidden agenda, particularly with regard to the future of the part-time element of the Ulster Defence Regiment? Will he also assure us that nothing will be done to reduce the strength or to limit the role of that part-time element?

Mr. Hamilton: I can certainly give the right hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks. There is no hidden agenda whatsoever for any of those moves. They are done for military reasons and to give us a more professional unit than we have had in the past. The number of UDR part-timers relative to the overall number in the UDR has been declining and it is likely that that decline will continue. It is not a sharp decline but the decline has been steady over the years. The ratio of permanent to part-time cadre will continue to change in favour of permanent cadre. We do not seek to get rid of UDR part-timers, as they are an important element of the security forces in Northern Ireland. They give us a reserve, because they can be called up for full-time activity, as happened following the recent terrorist outrages in central Belfast.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Minister give a figure? He says that the number of part-timers is going down. To what degree is that happening? Does the right hon. Gentleman prophesy that their number will continue to decline? Does he agree with what his senior colleague, the Secretary of State for Defence, said to my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and me—that eventually there may be no part-time UDR?

Mr. Hamilton: I acknowledge that there has been a decline in the number of part-timers in the UDR and we consider that the number will continue to decline. Nevertheless, if one extrapolates from the graph of the decline in the numbers of part-timers, one sees that it will take many years before we reach the point where there are no part-timers at all. We would be most concerned if we reached that point, because the part-time element of the UDR is an effective reserve that can be called up, as it was the other day, to provide a cushion and deal with surges in commitments.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Is the Minister aware that when his comments are read back in Northern Ireland they will cause real concern? They could be interpreted as a sign that the part-time element is being phased out completely. It is clear that, under the Government's control, a steady reduction has taken place in the part-time element of the UDR and the Minister has told us that that will continue. There will be great concern that the Bill is, in effect, part of that sad and cruel betrayal of a regiment that has stood in the front line of the battle against terrorism.

Mr. Hamilton: I hope that I can give every reassurance possible. I am simply saying that it would be unrealistic to say that the decline in the number of part-timers in the UDR would suddenly stop—I do not believe that it will. That slight but steady erosion will continue. We are committed to having a part-time UDR. We very much value it, and we have proved recently how extremely useful part-timers are in giving us a reserve capability when terrorist incidents such as those that we have seen recently occur. I sincerely hope that the part-time UDR will continue, but it is unrealistic to say that it will maintain its existing numbers, because there has been a decline in the past few years.

Mr. Molyneaux: Will the Minister, therefore, remove any possible suspicions that a plot is afoot by launching a campaign to encourage recruitment into the part-time element of the Ulster Defence Regiment?

Mr. Hamilton: We constantly look for recruits for permanent and part-time cadres, and that will continue. I see no changes there. It would be unrealistic of me to pretend that we shall maintain the present number of part-timers, but we value them very much. They are an essential part of the UDR as it stands and the Bill caters for them.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Perhaps the Minister will help the House by informing us exactly how much has been spent by the Ministry of Defence in advertising for part-time members of the UDR in the past two years.

Mr. Hamilton: I do not have that figure at my fingertips, but I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman a response when, with the leave of the House, I wind up the debate later this evening.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Has an assessment been carried out to establish the reasons for the decline in the part-time element of the UDR?

Mr. Hamilton: I cannot give an answer to that either, but I shall return to it in my winding-up speech, if that opportunity occurs.

In carrying out those tasks, which are often dangerous, UDR soldiers use the same skills and equipment as the rest of the Army. It is common practice for units of the UDR and of other Army regiments to be deployed together on the same operations. The vast majority of UDR operations, as for the rest of the Army, are carried out to meet specific RUC requirements. All operations need RUC approval and Army patrols are accompanied by the RUC whenever possible.

As we do not expect the nature of those military duties to change, it may well be asked, "Why change the UDR?" The regiment is, after all, well established now. It has served Northern Ireland for almost 22 years with distinction and courage. The bravery of the UDR has been second to none. We think of its casualties: 244 of its members or ex-members killed—"murdered" is the right word—many of them off-duty; and some hundreds seriously wounded. We think of the bravery and resilience of the families, and we think of the loyalty and affection that all officers, soldiers and their families feel for their regiment.

With those thoughts in mind, it would be wrong to make changes to the UDR's structure unless we genuinely believe—as we do—that they are in the best interests of all the men and women who come forward to serve in the regiment, and in the best interests of Northern Ireland.

The UDR has, of course, been changing and developing ever since its creation in 1970. As originally conceived, it was to have been an almost entirely part-time reserve, available for a limited range of emergency services. It is now much more professional and better trained than it was at the beginning.

Furthermore, the UDR has now been on continuous active service for a longer period than any other Army unit since the Napoleonic era. Although the total numbers have varied, the permanent cadre of the UDR has continued to grow over the years. It is now slightly over 50 per cent. of the total strength. Many of the UDR's soldiers have served previously in the Regular Army.

The UDR has, by virtue of its continuous deployment and the vital security role that it has played, certainly earned its place as an integral part of the British Army.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): The Minister has given a glowing testimony to the men and women who have served in the Ulster Defence Regiment for so many years in the most appalling circumstances. Therefore, does he not think that it is a betrayal of all their service and dedication to take their name away—a name which, he has said, occupies an honoured position in the annals of military history? Is he aware that, for years, the IRA and its sympathisers have been seeking the destruction and obliteration of the UDR?

Mr. Hamilton: I have talked to a number of members of the UDR, both officers and those from other ranks, about the changes. I think that they welcome the opportunities that we are creating. I think that, unfortunately, UDR members have felt themselves to be the poor relations in the British Army in the past, but they now see themselves as being much more fully integrated into the Regular Army. That is a tribute to their professionalism and an acknowledgement of the fact that they are professional troops. I believe that they welcome the opportunity to serve in other areas—it is nice to have that opportunity. If someone originally joins the UDR on the basis that he was to live and serve in Northern Ireland, it is nice if he is then told that he can serve in a Regular Army unit and travel to places all over the world if he wants a break or a change in career. It is good that such opportunities, which were not previously open to members of the UDR, should be available now.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): I hesitate to interrupt my right hon. Friend, as I know that he has much more to tell us. However, lest people listening to the debate should think that the five interventions that we have had are typical of what is felt on the issue, I should tell my right hon. Friend that not only has the colonel of the Royal Irish Rangers appeared before the Select Committee on Defence and warmly welcomed the changes, but so have——

Rev. William McCrea: Listen to the Back-Bench brigadier!

Mr. Mates: No, he is not a brigadier, he is a general —to give him his due, he is the assistant chief to the general staff and a very distinguished Northern Irish officer.

Rev. William McCrea: It is you we are talking about.

Mr. Mates: The part-time and full-time members of the UDR have welcomed the changes——

Rev. William McCrea: Rubbish.

Mr. Mates: Oh yes; they have done so, as they know that their career prospects will be increased, as do those in the Royal Irish Rangers in the Regular Army, who are looking forward to working with residents of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hamilton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—that is the impression that I have received. Clearly, not 100 per cent. of the people want change, but the same is true of many different elements of the results of "Options for Change". We know that some people do not want to amalgamate with other units—that is true across the whole of the British Army—but a substantial number of UDR members, both officers and other ranks, welcome the change and realise that it is in the best interests of both the regiments involved and the British Army as a whole and can only enhance the professional way in which terrorism is tackled in Northern Ireland.

However, the UDR is still to an extent separate, distinct and somewhat apart from the rest of the Arrmy, which has often been to its disadvantage. Rightly or wrongly, some of its members have felt that they were perceived, and perhaps treated, as if they were in some sense "second class". Other developments have accentuated the UDR's difference with the rest of the Army. It has been labelled, to its great distress, as "sectarian"—despite the fact that its membership once included many Catholics, despite continuing efforts to recruit more Catholics and despite all the regiment's efforts to protect the entire community even-handedly.

The overwhelming concern since 1970 has been to serve the community, the whole community, of both religious traditions.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is not the decline in the number of Roman Catholics in the UDR, from—I think—18 per cent. when the regiment was formed in 1969 to about 3 per cent. now, largely due to a campaign of murder, intimidation, pressure and harassment by the IRA and its sympathisers?

Mr. Hamilton: It is—we can largely attribute the decline to that. The oppressive campaign has picked on the Catholics. The difficulty of so many Catholics in the UDR is that they live in Catholic communities, where they are much more vulnerable to other members who live in a community that might do more to protect them. That has made life difficult for them, and it is most regrettable that such a change has taken place. We shall continue to do everything that we can to reverse that trend and ensure that more members of the Catholic community join the UDR. I am not saying that that will be easy, but one of our aims should remain to recruit more Catholics into the UDR, and I hope that the proposed changes will help us to achieve that. I am not saying that, as a result of the proposed amalgamation, there will be a dramatic change in the percentage of Catholics—although there will be an increase in the regiment as a whole, as the Royal Irish Rangers now have a much higher percentage of Catholics in their ranks. However, not all of them come from Northern Ireland; a number of them are recruited on the mainland of Great Britain.

The Ulster Defence Regiment members have no wish to be treated as some sort of political football. They want to get on with the job. They want to make the greatest possible contribution to the defeat of terrorism, whether from loyalist or republican groups. Against that background, we reached the conclusion that the UDR could only stand to benefit from closer integration with the Regular Army, by merging with the Royal Irish Rangers to form a new infantry regiment of the line.

[Mr. Hamilton]

The Royal Irish Rangers are uniquely well placed to help to bring the UDR more fully into the Army. They have close links with Northern Ireland, and a recruiting base throughout the British isles. The merger will provide an opportunity to enhance still further the professionalism and effectiveness that the UDR has already achieved. There will be an opportunity for a mutual exchange of experience and personnel between the two elements of the new regiment. The integration of training, and a common regimental approach, will improve the career and promotion prospects of members of the present UDR.

The proposal is to merge the two regiments on 1 July. The recommended name for the new regiment is the Royal Irish Regiment. That was the agreed recommendation of the two existing regiments. I know that some will regret the loss of the name "Ulster" from the title—the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) mentioned that—but the new regiment's title must reflect the composition, history and traditions of both partners to the merger.

The new regiment will initially have two "general service" battalions, ex-Rangers, with a worldwide role. The reduction from two to one battalion will take place next year. There will initially be seven home service battalions, formed from the existing UDR. That is the current number of UDR battalions. It reflects the recent amalgamation of four smaller battalions to form two large ones—without, however, any reduction in the total strength. The new home service battalions will have the same internal security role within Northern Ireland as the UDR does at present.

There will be a single regimental organisation and single headquarters. Training for the regiment as a whole will be centred on the new regiment's training depot. So far as possible, training for general service and home service soldiers will take place together. We have not yet made final decisions on the location of the headquarters or the training depot. Those important matters are being studied at the moment.

We believe that the merger will have positive benefits for all the members of both regiments. The Royal Irish Rangers will bring to the new regiment the traditions of 300 years of distinguished service by famous Irish regiments, and close association with Northern Ireland. The Royal Irish Rangers have recently been a part of British Army of the Rhine, from which they have undertaken tours of duty in Northern Ireland. We would expect the new general service battalion similarly to serve in the Province from time to time in the future. For the Rangers, the merger will also mean that they retain their base in Northern Ireland, and new recruits will be able to undertake their initial training in the Province—which should be a popular move for many of them.

The UDR will bring to the merged regiment the best features of its own unique tradition—the concept of military service to the local community. Part-time, voluntary service is a vital feature of the UDR which will be fully preserved in the new regiment. Closer association with the rest of the Army will mean in practice a cross-fertilisation between the general and home service elements of the Royal Irish Regiment. There will be opportunities for home service officers and soldiers to volunteer for general service training and tours of duty. Such opportunities will offer better prospects of career advancement and promotion for the former UDR officer and soldier.

Although some members of the UDR and the Royal Irish Rangers might prefer not to have to change, some change is inevitable, and should be of benefit to both. Achieving the benefits is a worthwhile challenge to both regiments. The Royal Irish Regiment will be unique in its intermingling of general and home service elements. The challenge is to create, in the new home service battalions, an even more professional, effective and flexible security force, operating in support of the RUC, and accepted and respected by the whole community of Northern Ireland, while the general service element plays a successful wider role.

It may be helpful to explain to the House why there is a need for a Bill at all. No legislation is required to achieve the other regimental mergers that are currently planned. Primary legislation is needed in this case because the UDR has a statutory basis, uniquely for a British Army regiment. Some right hon. and hon. Members will remember the passage through the House of the Bill that became the Ulster Defence Regiment Act 1969 and brought the UDR into being on 1 April 1970. That Act was consolidated into the Reserve Forces Act 1980.

In a nutshell, the Bill enables the UDR to be treated just like any other regiment and enables its members to become members of a regular regiment. They will no longer be members of a statute-based regiment. The Bill thus provides the framework for the merger to take place on 1 July.

The Bill does not itself bring into being the new Royal Irish Regiment. The naming and formation of regiments of the Regular Army, and the transfer of commissioned officers from one regiment to another on amalgamation, are not matters regulated by statute. They make no appearance, therefore, in our Bill.

Clause 1 provides that all members of the UDR will cease to be members of that regiment at the end of June. They will continue to be members of the armed forces and may be transferred to another corps or regiment. The effect of that provision is that commissioned officers could then be transferred to the Royal Irish Regiment by royal warrant, and soldiers could be transferred by administrative action.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Will my right hon. Friend say a word about the Greenfinches and how they fit into this structure? They are unique. If they are to become members of the Royal Irish Regiment, that will be the first infantry regiment in our history to include women members—or have I misunderstood?

Mr. Hamilton: That is absolutely right. The Greenfinches would then have the same role as now. We do not have women in front-line infantry regiments in the Regular Army, apart from assistant adjutants and a few other jobs of that sort, so there may be problems if Greenfinches transfer to general service battalions of the new regiment, but I suspect that not many of them want to do that in any case. If they did want to transfer, they would have opportunities in other positions occupied by women in the Regular Army, although possibly not in the new Royal Irish Regiment.

Mr. Molyneaux: I am sorry for intervening again, but, as the Minister rightly said, the Bill refers to the Reserve

Forces Act 1980, section 139 of which governs membership of the Ulster Defence Regiment; it also confers on members of the UDR the right to resign at one month's notice. Will that continue? If no provision for it to be continued is made in Committee, can that be done in regulations?

When the Defence Council proceeds to draw up the regulations, will it be possible for those of us with some little knowledge of these matters to assist in the process, bearing in mind that we advised the authorities last July that legislation would be required although they said that it was not? Will we be permitted to assist in drafting the regulations?

Mr. Hamilton: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind offer, which I shall put to my officials when the regulations are being drawn up. Members of the UDR transferring will take their present terms and conditions with them. They are all at some stage of a three-year term of employment, and however much of that term is still to be worked through, they will serve. They will be entitled during that period of three years' service to leave at one month's notice—that will continue after the merger. Subsequently, we will give them an extended period of service with the new regiment; they will come under the same terms of service as all other members of the Regular Army and they will have to give a year's notice to leave.

Anxieties have been expressed to me to the effect that people who are, say, under threat of assassination might want to leave at much shorter notice than 12 months. That sort of case will be looked at sympathetically by the commanding officer. There would be no great change in such exceptional circumstances. Once members come under a 22-year engagement, however, they will be expected in the usual course of events to give a longer-period of notice than 30 days.

Most of the rest of the Bill is concerned with the terms and conditions of service of existing members of the UDR and of future members of the home service battalions. These are important matters for the individuals concerned and for the future success of their regiment.

Current members of the UDR may, as clause 1 provides, continue to serve in the new regiment on their existing terms and conditions until the expiry of their current terms of engagement. Their present terms of service are provided for in various sections of the Reserve Forces Act and in the UDR regulations made under that Act. These will continue to apply as necessary, with one exception relating to training obligations: we want to make training on the mainland possible—it is not possible now.

Clause 2 enables us to draw up new Army terms of service tailored to the needs of the home service battalions. Most of the members of the UDR who will form those battalions, and future recruits to them, will only be required—I stress the word "required"—to serve within Northern Ireland.

At present, section 2 of the Armed Forces Act 1966 does not give us the power to limit service geographically in that way. Clause 2(1) remedies that. It further enables us to limit the service that may be required to part-time service, on a call-out basis, as in the UDR at present. The regulations concerned would be laid before Parliament.

I know that many right hon. and hon. Members and, indeed, members of the new regiment will be interested to know how their terms of service will be affected. UDR part-timers, like the permanent cadre, will be able to continue on their existing terms of service until the expiry of their current periods of enrolment. New terms of service, which the Bill enables us to draw up, have not yet been decided in detail. I can tell the House, however, that we do not envisage any significant changes so far as part-time service is concerned. That is to say that part-timers will continue to be subject to call-out, with a liability for full-time service when required, just as is the UDR at present. As an example of the current arrangements, we recently called upon several hundred part-timers to serve full-time in the Belfast area.

We believe that the part-time element, like its full-time colleagues, will benefit from full integration with a regular regiment. Part-timers will continue to provide a valuable and cost-effective service, but with better access to training and professional skills.

The details of the new terms of service for the full-time members of the home service battalions are still being worked out. I can tell the House in outline what we have in mind.

The terms of service will be more closely aligned with those for the rest of the Regular Army. The norm for the Regular Army is a 22-year engagement. That offers the potential advantage to the individual of a more secure career than the present UDR system, under which soldiers enrol, and may then re-enrol, for a maximum period of three years at a time. Transfer to the Regular Army open engagement would not make it impossible for certain individuals to serve more than 22 years, including earlier service with the UDR, if that was in the Army's interest; nor need the introduction of new terms prevent individuals from serving, as they may in the UDR at present, to a greater age than is customary in the rest of the Army. Each case will, of course, be considered on its merits and in the light of Army needs at the time.

We shall be considering very carefully the details of the new terms of service for the home service battalions, and how they will be introduced. Our principal concern must be the future effectiveness of the new regiment and its ability to do its job efficently. Any changes in terms of service that are needed for existing UDR personnel will be introduced sensitively and fairly and only if they are in the best interests of the new regiment. It is important to ensure for the part-timers, when they are called out, that the existing legal protections against the risk of loss of employment and certain other risks still apply. This is achieved by clauses 2(3) and 2(4) of the Bill. The remaining clauses of the Bill are largely consequential and need not detain the House today.

The Bill's provisions do not affect the total Army manpower requirement in Northern Ireland. That requirement may continue to vary in the future. The UDR does, however, make a most cost-effective contribution to our security effort at present. The home service battalions will continue to do so in future. We do not, therefore, expect any significant change in total costs to arise as a result of the Bill's provisions. I believe that the Bill will be widely welcomed in all parts of the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Minister has not said anything about what will happen to the Ulster Defence Regiment benevolent fund. As I am sure he is aware, the people of Northern Ireland have given generously to that fund and

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

I think that it stands at over £2 million. Those families who have lost UDR members in the battle are today asking what will happen to that fund.

Mr. Hamilton: That is a good point. In order to be exact, I must ask the hon. Gentleman to wait until my winding-up speech at the end of the debate. I suspect that the fund will be taken over and absorbed into the benevolent fund of the new regiment. That is what normally happens in amalgamations, and I should be surprised if anything different happened in this case. As I say, I shall give a more authoritative reply in my winding-up speech.

The merger that will take place as a result of the Bill's enactment will benefit both regiments. The new Royal Irish Regiment will be able to preserve and enhance the best features of both the Royal Irish Rangers and the Ulster Defence Regiment. It is important for the morale of both regiments that the planning date of 1 July for the merger should be achieved by enactment of the Bill. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.42 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Tragically, it is fitting that we should discuss the Bill today, because our debate occurs at a time when security in Northern Ireland is especially prominent in the minds of all hon. Members. The carnage of the past few weeks, which has left 27 people dead, reminds us all of our responsibility for ensuring that every appropriate forum and every appropriate measure is taken to protect our society, and particularly the troubled Province of Northern Ireland, from terrorism.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary and the British Army, through their professionalism and dedication, continue to perform their duties with outstanding courage, but they cannot be expected to carry the burden alone. We as parliamentarians owe it to them and to all the citizens of Northern Ireland and Great Britain to provide the political leadership and the material resources that will allow terrorism to be defeated.

In particular, we must continue to uphold the principle that terrorists, whether republican or so-called loyalist, shall never prevail. We must make it absolutely clear to the gunmen that their atrocities may earn them contempt, rejection and ultimately incarceration, but that they will never earn them a place at the negotiating table. I echo the Minister's words, that we believe in the democratic ideal and the rule of law. Because of that belief, we have but one choice and are without equivocation, ambiguity or division in our approach to terrorism.

There can be no excuse or validity for terrorist action in a democracy. We in the Labour party and, I am sure, most hon. Members recognise that, although the defeat of terrorism is not a sufficient condition for a solution to the problems of the troubled Province of Northern Ireland, it is a necessary one.

I am pleased to say that the Labour party unreservedly supports the measures proposed by the Minister. The proposed merger of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Rangers is a bold and imaginative step which, if properly administered and carried through, will harness the unique qualities of both regiments and lead to the creation of an even more effective force. Because of what we are discussing, it is important and appropriate to reflect for a moment on the 22-year history of the Ulster Defence Regiment and to put on record our gratitude to the 48,000 men and women who have served in its ranks.

Throughout the recent troubles, the UDR, of all the regiments in the British Army, has remained the most vulnerable to terrorist attacks. It has been under more pressure, a more direct level of threat, than any other regiment, consistently over the past 22 years. Tragically, since the formation of the UDR in 1970, many of its full-time and part-time members have been callously murdered by terrorists. I am sure that it is a matter of deep regret to all hon. Members that those murders are now numbered not in tens but in hundreds. Like all their colleagues, those soldiers joined up to protect their community in full knowledge of the extra dangers that they faced, precisely because they were residents of Northern Ireland. They deserve our deepest respect.

The Bill gives the UDR the opportunity to carry those traditions of bravery and resoluteness into a new regiment and, through it, into the rest of the British Army. I have no doubt that it will do so with all the determination that we have come to expect from it. We should feel confident about the success of the merger because the other regiment, the Royal Irish Rangers, has an equally distinguished record of service in the British Army. That was mentioned by the Minister. It is the product of a merger in 1968 between the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, the Royal Ulster Rifles and the Royal Irish Fusiliers.

The regiment's battle honours include Waterloo, the Somme and Normandy, to name only some, and they evoke many proud moments in the history of the British Army. Recently, the Royal Irish Rangers has seen service in Northern Ireland, and has also experienced the tragic loss of men.

The merger of those two regiments and the creation of the Royal Irish Regiment should be welcomed for a number of reasons. Not only will it provide the authorities in Northern Ireland with a new regiment which combines the best qualities of its two predecessors, but it will help to give the public greater confidence in the security forces, a matter to which I shall return. The formation of the Royal Irish Regiment will provide a useful opportunity to address one of the many difficult problems faced by the UDR—the religious imbalance in recruitment about which the Minister spoke.

When the UDR was established in 1970, approximately 18 per cent. of its recruits came from the Catholic community. In the 22 years since then, the IRA has made a particular point of waging a campaign of murder and intimidation against Catholics in the UDR, with the result that, today, Catholics make up only about 3 per cent. of the regiment's total strength. On a recent visit to Northern Ireland, I was extremely impressed—in fact, I was staggered—by the extent of the trouble, care, caution and expense that is required to protect that 3 per cent. of the UDR. They work under considerable pressures, perhaps much greater even than the other 97 per cent. of the UDR.

For whatever reason, the tragic fact is that only 3 per cent. of the UDR come from the Catholic community. We understand the reasons for that, and would not dream of making any cheap points about it. However, we would be naive to pretend that that fact has not increasingly been the cause of significant problems in the relationship between Catholics and the security forces. That is the reason for the IRA's intimidation in the first place. That is precisely why they wanted to reduce the number of Catholics inside the UDR.

However, as the imbalance in UDR manpower became more pronounced, many Catholics—including law-abiding Catholics—have felt less able to join the regiment, and relations between the regiment and the Catholic community have tragically deteriorated. Those tensions have seriously impeded the process of law enforcement, and attention should be given to overcoming them.

As about 30 per cent. of recruits to the Royal Irish Rangers are Catholic, we believe that the merger will create a regiment which will stand to benefit the security effort in Northern Ireland and also one which will more accurately reflect the religious composition of the community.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: In a minute.

I do not for a minute pretend that that solves the problem, because, in 1970, 18 per cent. of the UDR were Catholic. We may again be at the beginning of a cycle of intimidation by the IRA to reduce the balance of Catholics inside the new regiment and to create in turn the same form of alienation. That is why the problem will not go away, but at least this merger gives us another chance to deal with it.

Mr. Hunter: The hon. Gentleman rightly postponed my intervention, because he went on to answer most of my worries on the matter. We must be wary in our thinking on this issue. It would be quite mistaken to assume that the relatively high proportion of Catholic recruits in the Royal Irish Rangers will be perpetuated in the amalgamation. The hon. Gentleman has acknowledged the problem, and I thank him for his comments. I do not wish to introduce any element of confrontation between us. We must tackle this problem seriously, and we should continue to worry about it.

Dr. Reid: Absolutely: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Let us put on record the fact that intimidation does not happen by accident but is planned by terrorists to try to alienate further the security forces from the Catholic community. It will be a continuing problem: I accept that.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: However, it is worth making the point that there is a great difference between those serving in a general service battalion and those in a home service battalion. On the whole, soldiers who are recruited from Northern Ireland to many different regiments in the British Army have no great difficulty if they are careful about returning to Northern Ireland on leave. It is very different for members of the UDR who return home regularly every night—if they are not being kept out by the UDR. That is a much more difficult relationship, and they are in greater danger.

Dr. Reid: I take the Minister's point. With all those caveats and difficulties——

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann) *rose*——

Mr. Peter Robinson: So that Roman Catholics who wish to join the local home-based section of the new regiment do not feel isolated because of the intimidation that they would undoubtedly face, does the hon. Gentleman think that it would be helpful if all leaders of constitutional parties in Northern Ireland and Church leaders there encouraged them to join the local security forces and let them know that they are behind them?

Dr. Reid: Certainly that would be of assistance, but what would assist more than anything would be the creation of a political climate based on cohesion rather than division. That is a simple way to sum up several hundred years of problems—problems to which the House and many others applied their minds. Precisely for the reasons given by the Minister, it is difficult to maintain the present Catholic balance in the UDR. It may well be slightly easier to do so with a regiment which is more fully part of the general regimental system of the British Army, and which may assist elsewhere, not merely in the north of Ireland.

I was impressed by the nature and scale of the problem of maintaining Catholics inside the UDR when I went to Northern Ireland. Without wishing to go into too fine detail, the lengths to which the armed forces hierarchy has to go to protect the 3 per cent. of Catholics—by stationing them away from home and so on—is of proportions which can hardly be imagined by many Members of the House.

The amalgamation of the two regiments can only have a positive consequence by normalising the security situation. The more representative the security forces are in Northern Ireland, the greater will be their legitimacy. It will be easier for them to gain the trust and the co-operation of the public—encouraged, we hope, by democratic politicians of all persuasions and parties.

The reasons for the merger have been stated as military rather than political. Even so, I hope that the Government are sufficiently aware of the political benefits that may be derived from the merger to act wisely in its implementation. From what the Minister told the House, I am assured of that in these initial stages. I urge the Government to consider what steps could be taken to ensure that recruitment into the Royal Irish Regiment remains balanced.

The merger of the two regiments also offers us the prospect of an enhanced role for personnel serving in the UDR and the Royal Irish Rangers, which is a matter of some importance to their personal ambitions.

Through the general service battalion, members of the new regiment will have a chance to take advantage of the full range of opportunities offered by the British Army, including service in NATO's rapid reaction corps. Alternatively, by choosing to serve in Northern Ireland, recruits will develop their potential through some of the most challenging and demanding duties performed by any army in the world, not merely by the British Army.

The cross-fertilisation of different skills and experiences within the Royal Irish Regiment will improve its military effectiveness and allow it to make a unique and valued contribution to the British Army. Standards of professionalism should be considerably boosted by the merger, especially since clause 1 removes the current restrictions on training outside the Province of Northern Ireland.

The greater integration within the British Army which will result from the merger will be of great benefit for the Army and for those who choose to enlist in the new regiment. The Opposition urge the Government to continue to take measures to strengthen the full-time element of the merged regiment, since it will allow greater

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flexibility and operational effectiveness. We also hope that the Royal Irish Regiment will be able to guarantee greater security in its future recruitment.

Given the opportunities offered by the UDR, it was perhaps inevitable that terrorists would seek to infiltrate it to gain access to weapons and to training. Indeed, it is remarkable that such a relatively small number of gunmen have managed to evade the vetting procedures, with about 17 UDR members having been convicted of committing terrorist murders. That figure obviously worries all of us in the House, but, given the circumstances of Northern Ireland, it is perhaps surprising that it is so small. Appalling though that figure is—17 assassinations and murders—it has to be balanced against other figures. For example, the number of suicides among members of the UDR is several times that figure of 17, which gives some illustration of the pressures, strains and stresses under which those members of the UDR were working.

Nevertheless, the merger of the UDR with the Royal Irish Rangers will once again allow recruiting to be more selective, and, hopefully, will increase public confidence in Northern Ireland.

Sadly, the merger of the two regiments will lead to an estimated 750 redundancies—soldiers who have shown themselves willing to risk their lives for the public good. With unemployment in Northern Ireland standing at 14 per cent., even under the present system of assessing unemployment, it is five points higher than in the United Kingdom overall. Therefore, any redundancies in Northern Ireland are of considerable seriousness.

The prospects of the estimated 750 are even bleaker than those of service men and women who are being made redundant in other parts of the British Army. In implementing the cuts, I urge the Government to take proper and sympathetic account of the debt we owe to those who have served in the regiments and to respond accordingly in the light of the extremely difficult economic and employment circumstances of Northern Ireland.

I should like the Minister to outline the measures that will be taken to ensure that redundant personnel from either the Ulster Defence Regiment or the Royal Irish Rangers receive adequate help during the period of resettlement. As he did not do so in his opening speech, I hope that he will respond in his summation.

The Opposition are in no doubt that the merger of the two regiments will be a success. The British Army has many fine and distinguished regiments within its ranks which have been forged from previous mergers, including the Royal Irish Rangers. Like those other regiments, the Royal Irish Regiment will, we believe, be more than the sum of its parts. It will make a qualitative improvement, from which we shall all stand to gain.

The Bill should be greeted by all those who want peace and security in Northern Ireland. It will send yet another signal to the terrorist godfathers that we shall never be prepared to yield to force, that their efforts are futile. The Labour party will not be calling for a Division; and if a Division is called, we shall support the Government.

We firmly believe that, in years to come, the House will be able to look back and reflect upon the outstanding role played by the Royal Irish Regiment in helping to defeat terrorism and to establish the necessary condition for a political solution and in arriving at a peaceful and, God help us, prosperous Northern Ireland.

6.2 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I express my appreciation of the patience displayed by the Minister of State in giving way so frequently to those who wished to intervene and providing clarification and some reassurances—more of which will be forthcoming, I am sure, when he replies to the debate. I express appreciation also for the presence of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We know of his interest in the Bill, and he is aware of our views and interest.

Without wishing to embarrass the Opposition, let me say that I appreciate the balanced and fair-minded way in which their Front Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), set out their position. If we were not coming up to an election, I might be tempted to say that it was a refreshing change from some of the utterances that we have heard from time to time. I do not wish to create friction: I simply pay a genuine tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his deep understanding of the problems that confront the Ulster Defence Regiment and all of us who live in Northern Ireland.

The House will delude itself if it fails to take account of the suspicion in Northern Ireland that attends every reconstruction of the security forces. In the 1970s, the Royal Ulster Constabulary was reformed. It was disarmed and demoralised following the Hunt report. The constabulary was to become a police service, running advice centres at which tea and biscuits would be freely dispensed. Its reception centres were to be open to all comers. The Hunt report—this appears in paragraph 17 of the 1969 White Paper, and is a reference to the RUC reserve—stated:

> "Members of the Reserve will not be called upon to give armed support to the Royal Ulster Constabulary and they will therefore not be issued with firearms."

That is an example of how far Governments can sometimes be removed from reality when dealing with crucial matters. Within a short time, the RUC reserve was armed to the teeth; it could not have survived otherwise.

The Hunt report and a subsequent report recommended the disbandment of the Ulster Special Constabulary. Its crime was that it had a tendency to maintain stability, and by doing that it made life uncomfortable for law breakers, from whatever quarter they came.

In a lighter vein, I well remember one example of the even-handedness of the Ulster Special Constabulary. It was provided when a curfew was broken by the master of my local Orange lodge, who became engrossed in a friendly discussion with his Roman Catholic neighbour. As a result, both men were arrested by the constabulary. They had to continue their conversation in the cells in Antrim police station.

The disbandment of one force and the attempted emasculation of the other led to the state of lawlessness that has culminated in the savage butchery of recent weeks. The UDR was established by an Act of Parliament in 1969 and it was always clear to us, but apparently not to others, that its status could be altered only by an amending Act. There is a perception that the change in its status had its origins in the orchestrated campaign against the regiment. That campaign was a facsimile of earlier offensives against the Ulster Special Constabulary. The most vehement part of the campaign was that which followed the alleged leaking of photomontages of terrorist suspects. They were similar to the two that we see on the gate as we walk to the underground station on our way from the House.

Those who initiated the campaign—unfortunately, they are not present today—brought about what was known as the Stevens inquiry. As a result, they are directly responsible for the horrific increase in terrorist murders in recent months. The reckless behaviour of Deputy Chief Constable Stevens put at risk the lives of numerous families of UDR men.

Mr. Stevens chalked up yet another achievement. He swept into his net, intentionally or otherwise, the then leaders of the so-called loyalist paramilitary bodies, most of them for comparatively minor misdemeanours. I do not stand in their defence, but their places have been taken by younger, hardened and well-trained leaders, who are now building up striking forces, complete with hit men from abroad—outside the United Kingdom—with the object of matching the firepower of the Provisional IRA.

That is the achievement of those who set out to smear the UDR. I give them a friendly word of advice—that they would be well advised to refrain from similar campaigns, which might have even more disastrous throwbacks.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is it not a fact that, because of certain caches of arms in the south of Ireland being transported across the border, the groups to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred have far more striking power now than ever before?

Mr. Molyneaux: Yes, and that matter was raised on 12 December during Northern Ireland Questions, when the Secretary of State and I informed the House that we were aware of an accumulation of arms and munitions as far south as Limerick, for shipment to Belfast. Unfortunately, that occurred in the pre-Christmas period, with disastrous effects.

I fervently hope that the merger for which the Bill provides is for sounder reasons than those given when news of it was first leaked—for those set out in a document that I understand has been circulated to right hon. and hon. Members on the Benches opposite. At the time of the original leak, the main selling point was that the merged regiment would be more acceptable across the community by reason of its religious composition.

I am sure that my hon. Friends who sit on the Benches opposite agree that that is an entirely desirable objective. If it could be achieved, a balance would exist that roughly represented the religious composition of the Northern Ireland population. However, for reasons already touched upon, that is an unrealistic objective.

In its first few years, the Ulster Defence Regiment had the greatest ever proportion of Roman Catholics in its ranks. They accounted for about 20 per cent. of its membership, compared with about 2 per cent. today. The regiment also included a large proportion—as much as 50 per cent. in some battalions—of the much-maligned B Specials, yet we are told that the association of the Ulster Defence Regiment with the Ulster Special Constabulary is "unacceptable" to many Catholics.

Whatever other factors may have played a part in the rapid reduction in Catholic membership of the Ulster Defence Regiment and, sadly, in a virtual cessation of Catholic recruitment, it is undoubtedly the case that the fundamental cause of that change in the regiment's composition was that the IRA targeted Catholic members of the security forces even more viciously and relentlessly than it did Protestant members—and it still does.

On a personal note, it was a distressing experience in recent months to receive at my advice centre—separately, over a period of months—three young Catholic former members of the Ulster Defence Regiment whom I commended, and for whom I had supplied references in securing their enlistment. They quickly worked their way up to become commissioned officers, but eventually came to tell me, with broken hearts, that they were compelled to move house, and in two cases to resign their commissions and to leave the regiment, because the IRA would not allow them to remain in it. That is unsurprising, given the great ease with which the terrorists murder those who live in the same communities as they do.

At one time, two Catholic UDR men were being murdered for every Protestant member killed. The IRA realised, and still realises, that if the security forces in general and the localised Ulster Defence Regiment in particular could recruit successfully from the Catholic community, not only would its ability to operate be severely compromised, but its claim to represent the Catholic minority exposed as utterly fraudulent—which it is.

It is all too easy for those in the security forces—whether in the UDR, RUC, or Regular Army—to forget that even in so-called hard areas many are cowed into submission, and even into supporting the IRA, which uses the same terrorism there that is inflicted on the rest of us. It is difficult to see how cosmetic changes such as those proposed in the Bill will make any difference to Catholic recruitment—particularly in the border counties and other terrorist-infected areas, where such recruitment is most needed. Were it possible to recruit freely in those areas, there would be no need. We would have destroyed the bases of terrorism, and the UDR itself would become redundant.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): From my limited, second-hand knowledge from a variety of sources—I am part-Irish, being a mixture of southern Irish Protestant, Northern Ireland Protestant, and English Catholic—I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman's remarks are entirely true. However, perhaps he ought not to reach such gloomy conclusions. A large number of Catholics currently serving in the Royal Irish Rangers were either recruited on the British mainland, where they were not subject to the same constraints, or from parts of southern Ireland, where the IRA does not have a presence comparable to that found in the tough Belfast housing estates and other areas to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, where intimidation is rife.

Mr. Molyneaux: I do not dispute that, but a distinction must be made in respect of the Catholics—all honour to them—from southern Ireland or this island, who do not live in the frontier zones, where they would be completely isolated, and where it would be impossible to protect them effectively.

On another personal note, I remember having tea with the late Sir Norman Strong, whose son Jim served in the RUC Reserve. They were both murdered one evening, when their house went down around them. Jim entered the room and said, "Young John Smith has just joined the

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UDR part-time." Sir Norman replied, "My God, not another one." I said, "You misheard. He has joined the UDR—he has not been killed." Sir Norman told me, "It is all the same thing. He will be killed. I will show you where he lives." Sir Norman took me to the window and pointed to the home of that young recruit, which was 400 yards from the frontier. He said, "How can anyone, no matter how determined, protect him? He is as good as dead." That illustrates the extent of the danger that continues to exist not just in the frontier regions but in many other areas.

I am being not pessimistic but realistic when I say that it would be absurd to suppose that the new Royal Irish Regiment will be able to transfer to all its battalions the ability of the Royal Irish Rangers to recruit Catholics from north and south of the border. One fears that the opposite will be true, and that the majority of the members of that new regiment, in its anti-terrorist role, and even of the general service or ex-Ranger battalion, will suffer a serious reduction in Catholic recruitment.

That may be viewed as a pessimistic assessment, but I have taken the time of the House because I felt it necessary to explain that situation, so that, in time to come, the merged regiment will not be condemned for lacking sectarian or religious balance. I hope that others will express their views on that aspect, and that we can protect the new regiment well in advance, by being realistic and stating why it is not healthy—to put it mildly—for Roman Catholics to join it, particularly if, in a part-time capacity, they must live in dangerous or, as we call it, indian territory.

So what benefits can we expect from the amalgamation? It would be very welcome for the new regiment to be more fully accepted as part of the Regular Army than the UDR has been, but, if the price to be paid for this is the abandonment of the UDR's original role and purpose, we have to ask whether that price is worth paying. The UDR was formed as a kind of militia to be used purely in the internal security role in the area in which it was recruited, with the obvious very great advantages of local knowledge and continuity of experience that result from this. Field-Marshal Templer, commander of the only successful counter-insurgency campaign in modern military history, said that it was possible to defeat insurgency only with the assistance of locally recruited forces.

In spite of an unwelcome reduction in the part-time strength of the UDR over the years, and a welcome increase in full-time strength, efficiency and professionalism, the UDR has remained the same in essence until now, although the gradual decline in the number of part-timers has been a cause of concern.

Another matter of concern is the way in which the part-time element of the UDR, already under pressure in many ways, may be phased out altogether. I accept entirely what the Minister of State has said, that that is not his intention at the moment. However, it may be phased out not as a matter of overt policy but by the insensitive and counter-productive way in which it may be treated after the amalgamation.

Training requirements appear likely to be increased—that seems to be the intention—to a level which hardly any of the part-timers will be able to sustain, and this will leave them less and less time for operations. This in turn will eventually leave the Army able to claim that, although they are better trained, the part-timers are not cost-effective and should be done away with. Those of us who have served in the forces know how much rivalry there can be between the various arms of the services and even within the same service.

That would be a great tragedy, not only because of the symbolic importance of the part-timers, but because of the lessening of the UDR's local links, which have been of tremendous operational value, although all too often not fully utilised, and the great intelligence-gathering potential, also not fully utilised.

There would be the same sort of damage to both the morale and the operational effectiveness of the permanent Catholic element of the UDR if the officers and soldiers if the new regiment were increasingly posted further away from their home areas, as I understand is likely to be the case. I am talking about their being posted away from their own local battalion area to another area where they are complete strangers.

The position and the role of the part-timers are of supreme importance and simply must be maintained. No unreasonably high levels of training or other commitments should be allowed to force their numbers down even further and make them ineffective.

The full-time or permanent element of the UDR also must retain their localised recruiting and operational areas. Cross-posting between battalions should take place only when necessary, so as not to destroy the local knowledge value of the UDR. Similarly, officer and soldier training should remain tailored as far as possible to the internal security role. This should not mean, however, that former UDR personnel should continue to be treated as second-class soldiers or second-class citizens in terms of their careers within the regiment. They are internal security specialists and should be treated as such.

Ulster Defence Regiment officers and warrant officers should be given a fair share of appointments in the new regiment, even if they are not paper-qualified, because that is often irrelevant, and should have opportunities in the same way as their Regular counterparts.

The new regiment will mean that, gradually, all ex-UDR soldiers will be on Regular Army engagements and terms of service. It is absolutely vital that soldiers remain able to join their local battalions if they so wish and to remain with them, so far as manning requirements permit.

I will summarise the position of my party to this merger in this fashion. In the long term, it must also be ensured that soldiers may continue to specify that they wish to serve only in the Northern Ireland-based battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment, without unfair prejudice to their careers, for as long as the present situation—that is, the troubles—continues.

It should also be noted that, at present, a UDR soldier can leave the regiment on 28 days' notice. The Minister of State has already conceded that, although this should not normally be encouraged, given the peculiar and difficult circumstances in which many UDR soldiers live, this option must remain open. I know that the Minister meant what he said, and I trust that ways and means will be found to give effect to this.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): I rather thought, when the Minister was replying to that point, that he was talking only about the full-time members of the

UDR being able to benefit from the 28-day get-out clause. I am wondering what the situation would be for the part-timers.

Mr. Molyneaux: I thought that the Minister and I had it in common that we were talking mainly about the part-time element, because, as I understand it, we were talking about the reserve force and all that goes with it. The enlistment period for the full-timers would be broadly in line with that in the Regular Army. The Minister may like to come back to that point.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, but I think it best that I clarify this completely when I am winding up at the end of the debate.

Mr. Molyneaux: I am grateful to the Minister.

In short, the amalgamation must not be allowed to reduce the undoubted worth of the existing Ulster Defence Regiment as a locally recruited force operating in what one might call its soldiers' home areas.

I trust that all these points will be taken up and adopted when we come to drafting the regulations. I trust that the House will join me in expressing gratitude, as the hon. Member for Motherwell, North and the Minister of State have already done, to past and present officers and men of the UDR and the Greenfinches, all of whom have served with great distinction the law-abiding people of our part of the United Kingdom.

6.28 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): This is a sad day for Northern Ireland. The people of Northern Ireland are carrying a very heavy and tragic burden at the present time. I cannot think of a more insensitive Bill that could come before the House than the one now before us. I appreciate very deeply the realism that has been demonstrated both by the Minister of State and by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid).

I have sat in the House for 22 years. I have sat through debates in which the Ulster Special Constabulary has had its guts kicked on the Floor of the House and evil things have been said about it. There is not a right-thinking person who does not say that it is a pity that we did not keep the Ulster Special Constabulary; then we would not be in the mess that we are in today. I told the House that —and not with a few hon. Members present, as there are today. The House was crowded. Members were cheering, as if the House were doing a great thing. The House has not paid for that in the same measure as have the people I represent.

I first came to the House because of the issue of the abandonment of the Ulster Special Constabulary. The Official Unionist Member had one of the largest majorities in the House—some 40,000—but I toppled him. That showed that local people knew exactly what was happening. We know today what is happening, and we know to our cost what is going to happen.

This has been a planned effort on the part of those who want to destroy our Province, and to destroy its stability and the living conditions of its people. It flows directly from the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I have all the evidence before me today. I have, for instance, a statement issued by the then Taoiseach, in which he said that the agreement —he was glad that it had been signed—would

> "put forward Irish views and proposals for the progressive establishment of a new security system which would obviate a need for the UDR to be involved in local security. This will be pursued sensitively, carefully and firmly."

At every Irish conference meeting before the agreement took place, the now demised Foreign Minister made vicious, evil, unwarranted and lying attacks on the UDR. We have heard a eulogy of that regiment tonight, but we heard no such eulogy from the Foreign Minister. All that he did was kick the long-suffering people of Ulster in the teeth, including its widows and orphans.

More than once, I have told the Secretary of State before conference meetings that such attacks on the UDR drive at the very heart of the people of Northern Ireland. The right hon. Gentleman has admitted that at the meeting that I mentioned, Mr. Collins—who was to have brought up the issue and fought like a lion—never even mentioned the UDR. On television before the meeting, however, he expressed his anger, and his deep-seated hatred for the regiment.

It is interesting to note that we are not talking across the divide tonight, because those who represent the other side are conspicuous by their absence. We are told that we should be speaking to the other side, and we have come to the debating Chamber as elected Members; our opponents, however, have not come to take part in the democratic process. Here we have what the Taoiseach wanted.

Michael Noonan, the Irish Republic's Minister of Justice, commented on the Taoiseach's remarks. He said:

> "the first thing that they will do . . . is try to curb the paramilitary UDR."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1985; Vol. 87, c. 907.]

That was Garret FitzGerald's Justice Minister, describing the UDR as a paramilitary regiment.

In the House of Commons, I told the then Prime Minister—I wish that she were here tonight, because it was she who betrayed the people of Ulster—

> "It will come as no surprise to the right hon. Lady to hear that I shall not be commending this document of treachery and deceit to the House."

I was, of course, referring to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

> "As the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic arrived home from Hillsborough castle it was widely publicised on television, radio and in the press that he said:
>
> 'In future, the Ulster Defence Regiment will operate differently from the way in which it has operated for the last 12 years. That means that from now on the present position under which the Ulster Defence Regiment can stop people on the road, search them and question them will no longer operate . . . The question of how security should be organised in Northern Ireland is one for the new intergovernmental conference.'"

I asked:

> "In view of the fact that the people who live on the border in Northern Ireland get no defence from anybody but the Ulster Defence Regiment, what will they do in these circumstances, and why should a Prime Minister of a foreign republic have a say in the government and direction of a British Army regiment?"—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1985; Vol. 87, c. 22.]

I received no answer.

It seems very strange that a foreign country and foreign Ministers should be able to make it their aim to destroy a regiment of the British Army.

Rev. William McCrea: Does my hon. Friend know what strength of protest was made by Her Majesty's Government in the House to the Government of the Irish Republic about those despicable remarks about the UDR?

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Prime Minister said that the Taoiseach could interpret the agreement in whatever way he wished. He could put his own interpretation on it. But we know—and the Leader of the Official Unionists made it clear—that people who are not here today joined in the campaigns with gusto. Let me say, with fervour, "Yes, we honour our Protestant co-religionists who join the UDR, but we honour even more the Roman Catholics who joined."

I know what I am talking about. A dastardly deed was done at a culvert in South Down. Four members of the UDR were killed and a Roman Catholic was among them. I visited the family home—I make no distinctions in my visits. The father of the household said to me, "Dr. Paisley, I take it hard, but I take it harder because of what happened 10 minutes ago." I asked, "What happened?" He said, "The undertaker called to tell me that he could not bury my son. He said that if a hearse was brought into the street, the IRA would deal with it." The family had to summon an undertaker from 25 miles away. The church authorities then said that they wanted to see no flag and none of the trappings of the UDR if the coffin was to be carried into the church. That man was a Roman Catholic, who had served in the British Army. His was an Army family, and he had wanted his sons to maintain its tradition.

The same has happened over and over again. I salute the Roman Catholic members of the police, including those in my constituency, but they cannot go home. The hon. Member for Motherwell, North admitted that he was amazed at the extent of the activity that has to be undertaken to safeguard such people. We should consider the case of a young man who cannot visit his parents in North Antrim; they have to go to a safe place to visit him. Those young men have been targeted, and driven out. The IRA has decided to get them out. For what purpose? To turn the propaganda, and to say that this is a sectarian force. The merger that we are discussing bows to that pressure, whether we accept it or not.

I shall encourage people to join the merged regiment. I do not want it, but I shall not stand against anyone who wants to join. Indeed, when men have approached me I have said, "Certainly you should join and do your bit." But I have never heard the hon. Members who are absent tonight or the Roman Catholic Church authorities tell people to join the security forces.

Rev. William McCrea: It is very important that a certain matter be put on record. Does my hon. Friend agree not only that the IRA carried out attacks to drive Roman Catholic members out of the security forces, but that those Roman Catholic members have been isolated in their own community by their political representatives, who in this House are regarded as constitutional politicians, and by their Church leaders? On the one hand, they are driven out by the IRA, but equally they are isolated by people of whom this House speaks well.

Rev. Ian Paisley: No one knows more about this situation than does my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea), who lives with it every day.

Until there is a clear statement from the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Northern Ireland and its political representatives in this House that people should join the security forces, there will be no change in recruitment. These people need to be backed up when they join the security forces. They need the strength of their community behind them. But that is not what they have been getting, and the House should take note of that.

History is repeating itself. We remember the Hunt report. Lord Hunt decided that we in Northern Ireland were a crowd of bitter bigots and that there were no bigger bigots than the members of the police force. Hunt asked why a police barracks—police stations were called barracks in those days—should have iron doors. "Take them off", the police were told. I saw the iron doors coming off the police stations. "Why do they have iron shutters?" Hunt asked. "They are not necessary, take them off." The next question was: "Why do the police wear leather belts?" So the leather belts came off. During one debate in the old Stormont Parliament I said that the police might as well be given gutties lest they stand on somebody's toes. Then the point was made that the police should be dressed differently, so their uniform was got rid of, and officers were put into semi-green uniforms. The attitude was that everything would be better if everything were different. In a police station I said to an officer, "How do you hide yourself from attack?" He replied, "We don't hide ourselves—we are just to be slaughtered."

Did the Roman Catholic population suddenly turn round and tell everybody to join the police? No—they said, "We need to get rid of the police." At that time the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) said that what we needed was community police to which everyone could give allegiance. He said that it was necessary to press for a change in the identity of the RUC. We have been through all that and we have seen good men slaughtered, the best of men cut down. We attended their funerals, and we put our hands on the curly heads of little boys who would never see their fathers again. That went to the very depths of the people of Northern Ireland.

We thought that this Parliament was learning—that after all these years it would know that this is not the way to proceed—but today we have the same thing. As has been said, it is almost a replay, but in the years between we have suffered a lot. In many cases an UDR soldier is not a target but a victim. If he were a target he could fight back. I salute the UDR man who used his weapon on the border the other day. He got his man. If he had not got his man, he himself would have been taken.

Rev. William McCrea: Three of them ran.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, the other three ran, and were found hiding under a bush in the safe territory of the Republic, from which they will not be extradicted for trial. That soldier typifies the spirit of the Ulster Defence Regiment.

As the hon. Member for Motherwell, North said, more than 200 have been killed. What is more, a person is not out of trouble even when he leaves the Ulster Defence Regiment, as is shown by the fact that 45 ex-members have been killed. The number of members who have been seriously wounded is 377—some of them on duty, some of them off duty. Those are the men and women whom the Government must not forget.

No one can question the gallantry and loyalty of the Ulster Defence Regiment. I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Motherwell, North refer to the 17 men who had been convicted of murder, but we must remember also the number of members of other regiments serving in

Northern Ireland who have killed, and the number who have been convicted. Let it not be said that all members of all other regiments were perfect people who never committed a crime. Some were tried for atrocious killings—killings that I would not want to describe. Let us be clear about that. The Ulster Defence Regiment cannot be condemned because of those killings, and the SDLP has no right to condemn it. The members concerned were brought to court and tried. At present four are awaiting a re-hearing following examination of the evidence by the Secretary of State. We do not know what the result will be.

This condemnation of the UDR is disgraceful. It is a campaign of vilification and dishonesty against men who have given of their best. There is only one thing wrong with the Ulster Defence Regiment: it happens to be mainly Protestant. If it were a largely Roman Catholic regiment, we should not be discussing this Bill. We need to be clear about what the issues are.

There is no greater hardship than that which has been experienced by these gallant members of Her Majesty's security forces. They risk all to defend all, and they have been sacrificed by an inept security policy. The Ulster Defence Regiment has borne its burden and its share of the heartache. A regiment now consisting of 6,000 full-time and part-time soldiers has seen more than 200 of its members slaughtered by the IRA. I have referred to the four soldiers who were killed by an IRA culvert bomb near Dunpatrick. In July four UDR soldiers died when an IRA land mine exploded near Ballygawley, and in May 1991 three were killed in a massive lorry bomb attack at the Glenanne UDR base in south Armagh.

Before this House gives any credence to criticism of the regiment it ought to acknowledge the fact that in the last 21 years more than 40,000 civilians in Northern Ireland have passed through its ranks, and that in those 21 years only 17 members or ex-members have been convicted of murder or other terrorist-related offences in Northern Ireland. Of those 17, four are currently having their cases re-heard.

I must express my criticism of the Stevens inquiry—one of the worst things ever to have happened in Northern Ireland. The Stevens inquiry was unfair to innocent men. Mr. Stevens came over at a meeting and boasted, "I'll get men into the dock." That was his attitude. One Sunday he got the chief constable to identify members of the Ulster Defence Regiment who, in their various streets of Belfast, were not known to be members. He did not take these men in for questioning when they were on the UDR base. He could have had police officers at the gate, and the men could have been questioned on the base. Instead, he sent Land-Rovers, armoured cars and machine guns—the whole panoply—at 6 o'clock in the morning for innocent men, the vast majority of whom were proved to be innocent. After that they had to leave their homes. They had to pull out their furniture and their wives and children. The children had to be taken from school. That was done in the name of Mr. Stevens.

I am not an expert in spying, but if Mr. Nelson who is now in gaol was still doing his spy work, we would not have the groanings and crying over what happened in Ormeau road because, as his barrister said, he was a hero in saving people from being murdered. The House must recognise that. We can all be ethical at times and pass judgment but is the House helping us in the current situation to shoot people in the foot? That is what has happened and we must face the facts.

I shall go back to Northern Ireland to fight an election. The Labour party will not be fighting me because, for some reason, it does not believe in fighting elections in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Kilfedder: Are the Tories fighting you?

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Tory candidate has taken sick and I do not know whether the Tories will find another one. I should welcome a Tory candidate—I would fight him on this issue alone. The resounding answer of the Protestants and Roman Catholics who vote for me will show what they think of this measure.

I hope that the House will some day recognise the issues and that it will face them. Like my hon. Friends, I am worried about the present impasse. I can tell the Secretary of State that it is a different impasse. So-called Protestant loyalists are determined to answer killing with killing, outrage with outrage, and violence with violence. They will not spare man, woman or child. It is a terrible situation. I have seen principles sacrificed in the House because it is said that if we did this or that it would alienate the minority, but the House is alienating the majority and it should be aware of that.

It is strange that every hon. Member who speaks in this debate will say the same thing that the leader of the Ulster Unionist party and I have said. There is no disunity among us on that, except that I take a harder line. I shall divide the House, even if there are only two or three of us. Like the spokesman for the Labour party who said that he hoped that he could look back with pleasure, I hope that I shall be proved wrong and that 20 years on people will say, "You made a mistake." I hope and pray for that, but I know from the past record that a tragedy will arise from the merger.

I am already worried about the response. The IRA has said, "It is only a change of name—it is still the old regiment." All the Opposition parties—including the SDLP—said that they would be prepared to give the measure a fair wind, but that was all. They then asked why we should have a militia at all. I have not heard the Cardinal saying, "Join this new regiment; after all, your co-religionists from Liverpool are in it and you should join because I understand that many of the 30 per cent. of Roman Catholics in it are from Liverpool, and some from the south of Ireland, too."

Another outrageous aspect is the suggestion that it will be a good thing if Orange and Green are together in an Irish regiment on the streets of Belfast. I do not understand that—it would be dangerous for both groups. Any regiment built on that structure would be dangerous. It should not matter who was the officer or the regimental sergeant major—he would be a member of the Army and his religion should not be a factor. We are approaching a quota system such as that which already exists under fair employment legislation in the Province.

Will the Minister tell us more about the review or the public relations exercise of which we were told today? A public relations body took a poll of the UDR. It is amazing that we did not hear of it, as I have a lot of contacts. An hon. Member said that a general told him what he thought, but a general visited me and told me the opposite: he hit me on the shoulder and said, "Big man, you are right in your opposition to this measure." Who was polled?

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

We were told that the results of the poll showed that the Royal Irish Rangers were sort of neutral, but that the vast majority of officers and members of the UDR are all for the measure. I have not heard that, although I know that some officers do favour the measure. One reason is that they want to be integrated so that they can have a career in the Army, but that is not what men joined the UDR to do. They joined it to get out of the Army as quickly as possible, to end the troubles, to defeat terrorists and to return to civilian life. They did not join to have a career in the Army.

Will the Minister tell us more about the poll because we are very interested? Which firm undertook the poll? How many men were questioned? What were their ranks? Apparently civilians were visited and they were also in favour. The most interesting fact to emerge today is that there was a poll. The fact that the poll took place proves that there was something wrong because if one knew that the Army favoured the merger, one would not carry out a public relations exercise with testings and soundings.

We also need to know about the people who will lose their jobs. How many of the UDR bases will be closed?

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will my hon. Friend join me in asking the Minister if he can perhaps help to dispel the rumour—I hope that it is only a rumour—about the UDR base in Ladas drive in my constituency? Locally there is considerable fear that the Government intend to close it. It is an important part of the local structure and there would be great concern if it were to close. I have a unique relationship with my hon. Friend—he is my constituent and I am his—and as resident in that area he will have the same concerns.

Rev. Ian Paisley: My hon. Friend did not mention the fact that I am also his proposer at the election, and a voter as well.

It would be far better for us to know the whole story now. How many bases will be closed? I would also like the Minister to tell us how many part timers there are and how the number compares with last year. Why is there a rundown in part-time recruitment? Is it not because current advertising is for full-time recruits? If one does not advertise for part-timers, one cannot expect them to offer themselves. One could destroy the part-time category of the force merely by not taking on anyone else or by not advertising.

We should be given the bitter facts and we should face them. I do not want a constituent to say to me in a few months' time that I told him our base was going to stay open but that it was then closed. Let us hear how many bases will be closed. Let us hear the full sad story of how many jobs will be lost, how many bases will be closed and what the overall effect will be.

I shall listen carefully to the Minister. I hope that he will take on board the points that we made at our meeting with him this morning. We wanted a guarantee that when the Bill has been passed it will not be an excuse for getting rid of people now in the regiment. They are entitled to be in the merged regiment and they need to have a guarantee of that. The Act says, "may" instead of "shall" in one place, but even if it is changed to "shall" it may not cover the point that I am trying to make. Every member of that regiment, so long as there is no disciplinary charge against him, who is entitled to remain in the current regiment should be guaranteed a place in the merged regiment. We need an absolute assurance on that.

The point about resigning is very important in the circumstances of security. If a man is threatened, he may have to resign and clear his family out of the area. The 30 days should be kept.

In many ways these proposals come at a very bad time for our Province. I thought that it was a very wise thing that, in the midst of a tit-for-tat uprising of violence in the Province, the Secretary of State called out the UDR, and they were very effective; we got over that particularly severe time of killings. I should have thought that the Government would concentrate on using the UDR more. We are told that it needs to be cost-effective, but it is the cheapest form of security, costing less in a year than the Royal Ulster Constabulary costs in a week. That is something that we need to face up to as well.

In large measure, in certain areas where the UDR now operates people will feel defenceless. This sends the wrong message to the IRA—the wrong message at the wrong time. The UDR has come of age and has proved its effectiveness. It has seen 21 years of continual service and has earned royal honour. To merge it now will bring ignominy to its members and be an insult to Her Majesty who came over and praised the four battalions and gave them their colours.

We have been told that the name of Ulster cannot be used to describe any British regiment in the future. The name of Ulster has a greater right to be part of the name of a British regiment today than ever before, because it is the only part of Ireland that is still in the United Kingdom. The name should remain in the regiments of our Army.

7.2 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I desire to say only a few words on Second Reading because I have no substantial disagreement with what the Minister said in inviting the House to approve the Bill. In that respect, notwithstanding the passion and, I acknowledge, sincerity of the contribution of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), I regret that I cannot accept what I understand to be his central thesis—that some kind of conspiracy is afoot, the purpose of which is to do some damage to either the reputation or the effectiveness of the Ulster Defence Regiment. I do not believe that such a thesis is justified in the light of the circumstances outlined by the Minister. I should have preferred this matter not to be pushed to a Division, but if one is called my right hon. and hon. Friends and I will support the Government.

The issue to which we should address our minds is perhaps not the tradition of either of the regiments about which we are concerned but the effectiveness of the security arrangements which we will be able to achieve in Northern Ireland if this amalgamation proceeds. It is that and that alone that should be the justification for our decision.

I listened with some interest to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and the hon. Member for Antrim, North when they said that the low percentage from the Roman Catholic community who serve in the Ulster Defence Regiment was, in essence, an aim and objective of the IRA. If it was such, it has been manifestly successful, but we must accept the reality that the consequence is that inevitably the Ulster Defence Regiment is more readily identified with one tradition in

Northern Ireland than with the other. I do not doubt that the IRA, faced with an amalgamated regiment drawn from a much wider religious base, will endeavour to do the same again, but it will be the success and the strength of the amalgamated regiment that will be the best defence against that.

If the amalgamated regiment comes into being, subject to some qualifications here or some reservations there, its ability to provide the means by which the potential campaign of the IRA is to be defeated will be substantially prejudiced. There may be difficulties in creating a regiment which, for the foreseeable future, will be able to demand the support and confidence of the whole community, but that does not mean to say that we should not face up to these difficulties and endeavour to defeat them.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North commented on the fact that there are certain parts of the political life and of the religious life of the Province which had not yet been heard to say that, if it is desired to create a regiment which commands the support of the whole community, members from all sections of the community should join. I believe that they are wrong not to do that, but I also believe that they may be encouraged to do so in the future if they are satisfied that the regiment which is the subject of the Bill is one which, at least in the first instance, reflects a much wider religious base than does the UDR.

All those right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken have mentioned the bravery of those who serve in the Ulster Defence Regiment. A curious and dangerous feature of their service is that they are, uniquely, at risk all the time. They are at risk in their military role and they are equally at risk when they give up the military role and return to their communities. It might be said that in some respects they are more at risk in their own homes than when they are on patrol. That requires no ordinary soldiering but a very high level of individual responsibility and bravery.

Just as it is my proposition that the relatively narrow religious base from which the UDR is drawn reflects the extent to which the regiment enjoys the confidence of the whole community, so I accept freely that the bravery of those from the Roman Catholic tradition who join the Ulster Defence Regiment must be regarded as of an extraordinary order. They and their families, in particular, have been the subject of deliberate targeting by the forces of terrorism. I believe that the merger will more easily help those individuals, and others in the amalgamated regiment, to fulfil that degree of enhanced responsibility that soldiering in Northern Ireland necessitates.

In relation to the 17 people to whom reference has been made and to any others from British regiments who have been arrested or perhaps convicted of criminal acts in the course of their military service in Northern Ireland, I say: there is no place in the British Army for anyone whose standards and whose regard for the rule of law are other than the highest. Anyone, of whatever rank, who does not fulfil those responsibilities should be rooted out. I have no doubt that the Minister and I would be of one mind on that subject.

There are sound military justifications for what the Bill seeks to achieve. I believe that people from the UDR will be more effective if they are brought more fully into the British Army, and that the high professional standards of the British Army that will be available in the amalgamated regiment more readily than they have been in the UDR in the past are bound to enhance the capability of the members who previously served in the UDR.

With an amalgamated regiment, it must be right to provide a proper career structure for all who wish to take advantage of it. Surely it must be right, too, to provide a proper career structure and career opportunities for everyone in the new regiment who may have skills and ability that would entitle them to transfer to other Army units and detachments elsewhere in the United Kingdom forces.

We should not forget that the purpose of the Bill is to assist in the fight against terrorism, whatever motive the terrorist may have. All military means should be available to defeat terrorism. The House is united on that matter. The political consequences of the amalgamation will serve only to enhance the effectiveness of the military means at the disposal of the General Officer Commanding in Northern Ireland.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. and learned Gentleman has just told the House that he believes that the Bill is designed to defeat terrorism. Does he really think that if it were not for all the other changes being made in the armed forces the Bill would have been introduced anyway?

Mr. Campbell: I cannot say. Amalgamations of mainland regiments have been controversial, too, but—with the exception of hon. Members representing Northern Ireland—I do not believe this amalgamation to be controversial at all. Even if the amalgamation had been suggested outwith the ambit of the "Options for Change", I should still have supported it because the central thrust on which it is based is valuable, and should be supported.

The House listens to a catalogue of horror of events in Northern Ireland. For me, at least, the repetition of such events increases rather than diminishes their effect, and it also increases my frustration. If that is true for me, how much more true must it be for the Secretary of State, who has been in the Chamber for most of the debate, but who is not here at the moment?

I imagine that that frustration is felt, too, by those who are democratically elected to represent Northern Ireland constituencies in the House. They live in the communities ravaged by the activities of terrorists. Their lives are subject to the inconvenience and the grief that terrorism brings.

The Bill will not resolve the current problems in Northern Ireland. If any of us had a simple solution I fancy that we should have found it long ago. But, especially in the light of the speech by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, I hope that the Bill will help to provide conditions in which the difficulties in Northern Ireland may more easily be tackled.

7.13 pm

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): I shall support the Bill, but more in the hope that it will achieve its objectives than with any conviction that that will be the case.

I believe that I speak as the only Royal Irish Fusilier in the House of Commons. My regiment, with the Royal Ulster Rifles and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, now forms part of the Royal Irish Rangers—a regiment which came into existence in 1968, and is, of course, one half of the regimental collaboration outlined in the Bill.

[Sir Michael McNair-Wilson]

My regiment was the 87th/89th Regiment of Foot, raised in 1793. It had a proud and distinguished history. It captured the first Napoleonic eagle to be taken by a British regiment, at Barrossa, in the Peninsular war. It has had many battle honours, and its museum and regimental headquarters were at the old Gough barracks in Armagh.

Like any other proud regiment, I do not think that it found its subsumation into the Royal Irish Rangers the easiest of the many problems that it has had to overcome in its 175 years of existence. However, that amalgamation went better than anybody had dared believe it would, even if it meant a new name for the regiment, new brothers in arms and a new depot. I hope that the same will be true of the amalgamation that we are debating. Perhaps the word "Rangers", with its echo of the Connaught Rangers, made the Irish Fusiliers feel a certain kinship with other distinguished Irish regiments which now exist only in pages of military history.

So the Royal Irish Rangers became Northern Ireland's own regiment in 1968. But, as was the case when I was with the Fusiliers, it still drew a high percentage of its intake from south of the border. The Irish, whether they be Ulstermen or from south of the border, make good soldiers. They also make good field marshals. I have only to remind the House of Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, Lord Alexander, Lord Montgomery and Sir Gerald Templer, to underline that point.

The Irish Fusiliers had both an Anglican and a Catholic padre because of the number of soldiers from both denominations serving in the regiment. If one wanted an example of the fact that both sides of the community can live and work together, there could be no better illustration. I cannot recall any incident involving sectarianism while I was serving with the regiment. Today, I understand that 30 per cent. of those serving in the Royal Irish Rangers are Catholics.

What is more, after all the years in which Irish regiments were kept out of Northern Ireland because of concern that their presence might cause friction between the two communities, the Irish Rangers completed two successful tours of duty in the Province, in 1990 and 1991.

I make those points to underline the fact that the three traditional Northern Ireland infantry regiments have already endured the tremendous upheaval of giving up their separate histories, identities, depots, and individual traditions to create the Royal Irish Rangers only 24 years ago. Having made that amalgamation work, they are now being asked not only to forgo one of their two regular battalions, but to accept the disappearance of the regiment into an entirely new unit, the Royal Irish Regiment, which its proposed make-up would seem to make unique in the Army.

That will mean much more than a name change, a new cap badge and a new regimental depot at Ballykinler. Effectively, it will involve the creation of a different kind of regimental structure, even if there will be increased possibilities of promotion for its members.

I recognise that some regiments which are disappearing altogether as a result of "Options for Change", and others which are undergoing huge changes, may consider that the Royal Irish Rangers are luckier than some; but I still believe that an amalgamation with the Ulster Defence Regiment is not the same as uniting two English line regiments into one.

The Rangers and the UDR have a very different pedigree. I make that statement with the memory of a conversation that I had in Northern Ireland in 1970 with Brigadier Ormerod, one of the first senior commanders of the UDR—as it happens, he was a former Irish Fusilier. I realised with what high hopes he viewed the new regiment, with its avowed intention of becoming a non-sectarian internal security force within Northern Ireland, a bit like the B Specials, but drawing its support from both sides of the community. A non-sectarian home guard seemed to be the ideal answer to the terrorist, and initial recruitment to the UDR seemed to bear out that hope. At the end of our conversation, I remember Brigadier Ormerod saying to me: "Now it's up to you politicians to get the politics right"—as if, with the UDR, the politics of internal security had been resolved.

In the early months of the UDR, it seemed as if the regiment would be able to recruit from both sides of the community, and at one time, as so many hon. Members have said, almost 20 per cent. of its members came from the Catholic section of the community. The regiment was not as large as it is today, so the figure of 20 per cent. can be misleading. In the past 20 years, that component has dwindled to the present figure of between 180 and 200 members from the minority community, in a regiment comprising 6,000 men. As everyone has said, they are very brave people, because they know with what studied ruthlessness the IRA has made off-duty Catholic members of the UDR its special target, both to intimidate those who might think of joining and to encourage the idea that the UDR is essentially a sectarian force.

Sadly, a small number of the regiment have added weight to that charge; as has been said today, 17 have been convicted of murdering 15 Catholics, although serious doubt remains about the culpability of those called the "UDR Four". Other members have been convicted of lesser offences, so much closer screening of applicants has now become standard practice.

As a result of the Bill, will those who join the Royal Irish Regiment have to go through the same screening process, or will it apply only to the home service battalions of that regiment? Will my right hon. Friend the Minister say something about that when he winds up? It would seem difficult to avoid that vetting procedure if we are not once again to find that charges are made against members of the force, yet I cannot see how, in an Army unit, it would be fair to have one rule for the home battalions and another for the regular one.

The regiment has taken more than 220 fatal casualties, and about 450 members have been wounded. Its 6,500 men and women provide 11 million man hours of military service every year, and the regiment has provided an essential element in the security set-up in the Province. At no time has that brave regiment deserved the statement made about it in a BBC "Panorama' programme:

> "This regiment of Protestants is part of the problem it was intended to solve."

Nor does the regiment deserve the equally dismissive remark by the previous Irish Foreign Minister, Mr. Gerry Collins, who said on television:

> "The UDR has no role to play as presently constituted."

Mr. Collins was speaking as a Minister of a country that was a joint signatory to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which was designed to produce peace, stability and reconciliation, but which has yet to show that it can achieve even one of those objectives. I hope that the words of Mr. Collins have had no bearing on the changes that we are debating tonight. He spoke at a time when the Republic finds it difficult to mount a border police task force of more than 40 or 50 men. When one considers that it is a 300 mile-long border, that is wholly inadequate by anyone's standards. His words, like those of "Panorama", must have been sweet music to the IRA in its attempts to discredit the UDR. That brings me to my concern about the amalgamation.

The security problem in Northern Ireland has gone on for 22 years. From time to time, things seem to go better and terrorist incidents fall off. We hear that troop numbers are to be reduced. In the House, we pass improved criminal legislation. Police forces are strengthened. Then there is another upsurge in violence, as is happening at present, more troops are sent out to the Province; and so it goes on, year in and year out, but the terrorism always goes on at some level.

We now see the ugly development of tit-for-tat sectarian murders. I presume that those who carry them out belong to a generation different from those who were leading terrorism at the beginning of the troubles. Whatever the case, the sectarian killings mounted from the Protestant loyalist side of the community seem to carry an implication—a hint—that public confidence in the ability of the security forces working within the present constraints of the law to defeat terrorism is wearing thin.

These people take matters into their own hands on the basis, "If you kill one of us, we will kill one of you"—a sectarian lynch law. Such a development carries with it many dangers, including a greater escalation of violence. If it is to be stopped, public confidence must be restored, and that must mean a reappraisal of the present security policy and of the role of each of the services involved in it.

The UDR was raised and recruited to be an internal, non-sectarian security force. It began with a large part-time element, and even today that element is still more than 50 per cent. of the total strength. Now, instead of being an exceptional regiment for an exceptional task, the UDR will become part of a new northern Irish regiment—the Royal Irish Regiment—which itself will represent two traditions.

One tradition is that of the Royal Irish Rangers, a Regular Army regiment derived from the three long-established infantry regiments to which I have referred, serving on all fours with other infantry units in the Army. It goes abroad as they do, which may be one of the reasons why some cross the border to join it. That regiment and its traditions are now to be linked with the internal security force—the UDR.

The hope seems to be that the merger will give the new regiment the traditions of the Rangers and of the Northern Irish Brigade from which it sprang, and a new professionalism for its home service battalions because of its being part of a Regular Army formation. It is hoped that the Royal Irish Regiment will continue to be able to attract as high a percentage of recruits from the Catholic community as the Rangers did. All those objectives are admirable, and I hope that they will be achieved, but I wonder whether they are as easily attainable as the Minister would have us believe.

I presume that some consideration was given to those objectives and to a similar regimental structure when the UDR was first considered in 1970. I presume that the difficulties of creating an homogenous but hybrid regiment were considered at that time to be too difficult to resolve, especially as the two tasks of the regiment as it is now to be constitued are almost mutually exclusive. Can my right hon. Friend tell me whether the regular battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment will also perform duties in Northern Ireland alongside the home service battalion or whether it will always be deployed outside the Province?

How easy will it be to create a single regiment to which everyone will feel the same loyalty when it will comprise four different categories of soldiers? There will be regulars designated for service all over the world; regulars confined to Northern Ireland; part-timers to serve in the Province; and Territorials. Although I hope that the amalgamation will produce the effects desired by the military planners, I have considerable misgivings that the new regiment will inevitably be tainted by the political climate of Northern Ireland, with its sectarian intimidation, in a way which did not happen to the Royal Irish Rangers and thus kept it out of the present troubles. I also fear that that may make the task of the home service battalions of the new Royal Irish Regiment if anything more difficult to achieve than was the case with the UDR.

7.28 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): It is entirely appropriate, when the UDR is being merged into a new regiment, that one should begin by paying tribute to the thousands of men who, over the past 20-odd years, have served the whole community excellently within that regiment. I shall not go into that tribute in great detail. Comments have been made by hon. Members of all parties and I know that the men will appreciate the sympathy and good will which have been expressed here this evening, and the recognition of the tremendous sacrifice that so many Ulster men have made in their service in that regiment.

Reference has been made also to the small percentage of the minority community in Northern Ireland still serving within the UDR. Some 18 per cent. was achieved when the regiment was first formed, with an enrolment figure at that time of some 4,000, but as a result of intimidation by the IRA, that percentage has now dropped to 2 to 3 per cent., or between 150 and 200 men.

I wish to say a special word about that small number of Roman Catholics from Northern Ireland who, despite all the pressures, continue to serve. Curiously, it is a smaller percentage than that within the Royal Ulster Constabulary, some 8 per cent. of which is Roman Catholic. As the RUC has a total strength of some 12,000 men, 8 per cent. means about 1,000 people. Therefore, some 1,200 Ulster Catholics actively serve in the security forces to defeat terrorism. That is many times more than the number of Roman Catholics in Ulster actively engaged in Republican terrorism, which is a sobering thought. There is no reason to doubt that the number of people actively involved in Republican terrorism at any one time is between 200 and 500, so they are outnumbered several times by the Ulster Catholics serving in the security forces.

I mention that balance not simply to pay tribute to Ulster Catholics serving in the security forces but to draw attention to the skewed concern expressed by Roman Catholic community leaders and politicians, who are constantly concerned to ensure that the security measures taken, legislation passed and action undertaken by the

[Mr. David Trimble]

Government should not bear too hard on the poor terrorists. They do not express the same concern about the larger number of their community and flock who are actively engaged in the fight against terrorism and who, in many cases, pay a very high price. That contrast says much about the attitudes, loyalties and sympathies of the people who express that inappropriate concern.

A further question with which I should like the Minister to deal when he winds up the debate was sparked when I read the otherwise excellent brief prepared by the Library, which says:

> "The UDR does not patrol West Belfast Londonderry or the border area of South Armagh, nor does it engage in crowd or riot control."

Will there be any limitation or prohibition on the service of the new regiment? Will it be limited to certain geographic areas and told not to enter other areas which we refer to as "bandit country", which are virtually under the control of terrorist organisations, thus leaving those areas under terrorist control? Will there be certain forms of service or activity in which that regiment cannot engage? Restrictions such as those mentioned in the brief are not realistic and I hope that the assimilation of the UDR into the rest of the Regular Army will be accompanied by assimilation of the service that they undertake and the areas in which they undertake it.

As the Minister knows, my hon. Friends and I feel strongly, as does the wider community in Northern Ireland, about the name of the regiment. We bitterly regret the fact that the term "Ulster" will disappear and that the regiment will instead be called the Royal Irish Regiment. I appreciate that a certain cast of mind on this side of the Irish sea is unable to recognise the existence of Ulster and prefers simply to use the term "Irish" at every opportunity. It fails to recognise the culture and identity of those hon. Members who represent Ulster. The name may simply reflect that blindness to our identity and traditions, but it is particularly unfortunate because I understand that there used to be a Royal Irish Regiment that was recruited in the Dublin area. It was disbanded when the 26 counties seceded from the United Kingdom in 1922. To revive a title associated with Dublin and apply it to Ulster is particularly maladroit at present.

The Minister said that the new title reflects composition—I presume that he meant the composition of the Royal Irish Rangers—and reference has been made by several speakers to the composition of the Royal Irish Rangers. I regret to say that those references were not particularly accurate. Again, I refer to the Library's brief:

> "In contrast to the UDR, the Royal Irish Rangers present a more equal reflection of the Northern Ireland population. Around 30 per cent. of the regiment is Catholic, with approximately 15 per cent. coming from the Irish Republic".

That figure of 30 per cent. has been quoted by several hon. Members this evening, but I am sorry to say that it is not accurate. Way back in October, I tabled a question asking for a breakdown of the Royal Irish Rangers by nationality and religion. The holding answer appeared in *Hansard*. I then received a letter, which was a curious way to proceed. I am not sure why the letter could not have appeared as an answer in *Hansard*. It could then have been available to all hon. Members. Naturally, I circulated my letter to people who were interested.

It may be appropriate if I now put that answer on record so that everyone will know the precise breakdown of the Royal Irish Rangers, as given to me in the letter from the Earl of Arran. The information shows the position as at mid-October last year. It says that, of the officers, 63 come from Great Britain and 32 per cent. are Roman Catholics; 49 come from Northern Ireland and 12 per cent. are Roman Catholics; 13 come from the Republic of Ireland and 77 per cent. are Roman Catholics. Of the other ranks, 382 come from Great Britain and 38 per cent. are Roman Catholics; 836 come from Northern Ireland and 11 per cent. are Roman Catholic; 70 come from the Irish Republic and 94 per cent. are Roman Catholic.

I deduce from those figures that, in the regiment as a whole, 24 per cent. are Roman Catholics. Some people may say that the difference between 24 per cent. and 30 per cent. is not significant, so why quibble about it? But the number from the Republic of Ireland is not 15 per cent.; it is only 83 people, which is 5·9 per cent. There is quite a difference between 6 per cent. and 15 per cent.

I mention those points because so many hon. Members said earlier in the debate that they hoped that the mix within the Rangers would carry over to the UDR, into the new regiment, and somehow affect that. But when we consider the breakdown of the existing Rangers, we can compare the small percentage of persons from the Republic of Ireland with the small percentage of Catholics from Ireland. The great bulk of Catholics from the Rangers are from England. Although they may be of Irish descent, it still makes a difference, which hon. Members will appreciate.

Of the total number of people in the regiment, breaking them down by origin, 62·6 per cent. come from Ulster, 31·5 per cent. from Great Britain and 5·9 per cent. from the Republic of Ireland. The 1,400 men in the Rangers together with the 6,500 men presently in the UDR will form the total regiment. We are told that 750 of the 8,000 will drop out.

It is obvious that the bulk of the men in the new regiment will be men who are at present in the Ulster Defence Regiment. That offers the prospect of the new regiment reflecting more accurately the character of the existing UDR rather than the Royal Irish Rangers. I appreciate the concern of the hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) who feared that the Rangers, of whom he is justly proud, would be somewhat swamped—that is my word, not his—in the new regiment.

I underline my dislike of the title of the new regiment. To be told that the word "Irish" is used to reflect recruitment from the Republic of Ireland, when only about 5 per cent. of its smaller element will come from the Republic, is a vicious case of the tail wagging the dog. The title is not appropriate. As the Minister knows, we would have preferred the title of the new regiment to reflect its origins and its character, and be called the Royal Ulster Regiment, or something of that sort.

The Minister said that senior officers in the Royal Irish Rangers welcome the merger. I am sure that they do, and I am not surprised about that. Under the "Options for Change" review, it was inevitable that, even if nothing else happened—given the reductions and mergers in other regiments—the Rangers would drop from two battalions to one. The Royal Irish Rangers would probably have lost the depot in Ballymena and have had to share another depot on the mainland with other regiments. The Rangers would have lost their character and identity as a result. No doubt, the officers in the Rangers who welcome the merger see it as a way of keeping some of the regiment's identity in Ulster and enabling them to command a much bigger organisation than would have otherwise been the case. However, I believe that, within the UDR, there is much unease. Some people are opposed to the merger and some have been persuaded that it is a good idea on the grounds of the wider opportunities and so on that the Minister and others described. However, the best way to describe the views of the majority of men is that of unease, compounded by suspicions arising out of past changes and mergers.

We have been told that the merger is Army-driven, in the sense that the decision was largely influenced by the Army's views, but I do not think that the scheme can be divorced from the relentless political pressure that has come from the Republic of Ireland, from Irish nationalist politicians and from other community leaders in Northern Ireland who have attacked, particularly, the part-time element. That factor cannot be left out. In addition, the scheme cannot be divorced from the pressures generated by the "Options for Change" review. Those two factors point to a reduction in, if not a phasing out of, the part-time element. The Army is being reduced in size from about 50 battalions to 36 infantry battalions, leaving the Gurkhas out of the account. I am not sure why the Gurkhas are banned from coming to Northern Ireland —it is not because of our racism. They would be made welcome by my constituents. Unfortunately, the Army seems to regard it as impossible to deploy them, and that leaves 36 battalions.

Hon. Members will know that, under present arrangements, up to 20 battalions may have to serve in Northern Ireland in one year. That figure is made up of the six battalions that are on a two-year stay, up to a dozen battalions on four-month tours and one or two spearhead battalions on tour. In an army of 36 battalions, that load cannot be sustained. The only solutions are to reduce drastically the total deployment in, and commitment to, Northern Ireland—which it may not be possible to do if current levels of terrorism increase—and drastically to reduce the number of units that are on short four-month tours or find another source of full-time men to replace the existing Regular battalions. It is from there that the Army-led pressure to reduce the part-time element will come.

The figures for last July show 3,500 part-timers in the UDR, and that number may be reduced to 1,000 or 1,500. The Army has said that it has no intention of phasing out the part-time element completely, but enough statements have been made over the years to make it clear that there is a desire to see the part-time element diminish. If the figure goes down to 1,000 or 1,500, giving another 2,000 to 2,500 full-timers, that is equivalent to three full-time Regular battalions. That would reduce the need to rotate Regular battalions in Northern Ireland. That is the Army-led pressure to reduce the part-time element. There is always relentless political pressure from republican and nationalist sources, and it is particularly targeted on the part-timers. I believe that those two factors are influencing the Army's future.

Another factor underlines why I believe that the way in which the Army is progressing is not desirable. As a result of "Options for Change", the infantry section of the Regular Army will be significantly reduced. I have been told that there will be about 10,000 compulsory redundancies. Another 30,000 infantrymen may have to leave the Army if they are not re-engaged at the end of their service.

If up to 40,000 Regular soldiers had to leave their colours and there were opportunities within the full-time element of the new Northern Ireland-based full-time regiment, it would not be unreasonable to assume that a significant number of Regular soldiers who found themselves out of work or redundant would volunteer to join what would be the equivalent of a full-time UDR. There are already a significant number of Scotsmen and Englishmen serving in the UDR and, under the changes that I am envisaging, it is likely that that number will increase substantially.

I suspect that that move would be welcomed in some Army circles. There is anxiety about the reliability of the native Ulster troops not behaving themselves and doing something which is best left to others' imagination. It may be felt that the unit will be more reliable if it contains a higher percentage of Englishmen and Scotsmen. But is that wise?

The men who, on finding themselves no longer employed in the Regular Army, decide to come to serve in Northern Ireland in the equivalent of the UDR might not come out of the purest of motives. They may come because they have a score to settle. Reference has been made to the Stevens inquiry, which was sparked off by revelations about leakage of information from the security forces to loyalist terrorists which resulted in the targeting of republican terrorist suspects.One of the first such cases was that of Loughlin Maginn, a republican terrorist suspect who was murdered by loyalist terrorists. The information targeting Mr. Maginn was leaked from the UDR. Two UDR men, one of whom was an Englishman, were charged in connection with the offence.

It is ironic that the Irish Republic, which concentrates its fire on UDR men, likening them to the equivalent of the hated B Specials, may be about to create a new scenario involving the sons of the black and tans. I wonder if that is wise—I am sure that it is not. I have no desire to see people from England and Scotland excluded from serving with new regiments—indeed, many of them are welcome —but the danger is that they may be coming with scores to settle.

A rundown in the part-time element is in itself undesirable. Contrary to what some say, there is a need for a militia-type operation and organisation to deal with terrorism. A locally based security force with local knowledge is of great assistance. It would be undesirable to lose such local knowledge and the ability to share around local men. That is why I have grave reservations about the merger—it leads in the wrong direction.

There is a clear need, too, for welfare support. The UDR is under unique pressures because its members—and the men of the new regiment—serving in Northern Ireland will always be under threat, on duty, off duty, when trying to relax and even for years after they have retired. Consequently, there is a significant need to provide them with good welfare support so that, in the terrible event of men being killed or injured, their families can be supported. I know that the UDR does a considerable amount of valuable work in trying to support the families and widows of men who have lost their lives in the emergency.

I understand that the formal arrangements for welfare in the UDR go further than those made in the Regular

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Army. The families of soldiers who die in Northern Ireland and who served in the Regular Army find that they do not receive the same formal support from the Army. They may receive a certain amount of informal support from the regiment's trusts and benevolent associations. I hope that, with the UDR's greater assimilation into the Regular Army, its welfare arrangements will not be prejudiced.

Sometimes there is a little friction between UDR men and Regular officers, particularly officers who come into the UDR and do not appreciate the need for welfare. But it is needed, not just because of the desirability of looking after widows and the children of the bereaved but because a locally recruited regiment serving in a locality should not be seen to be less than caring for the families of those who have made sacrifices. If it were seen as less than caring, that would strike a real blow at recruitment and morale. We need to sustain and improve those welfare facilities and I trust that they will not be prejudiced by the UDR's assimilation into the Army.

Some hon. Members have already referred to the sad fact that, over the years, some members of the UDR have gone off the rails. We have been told the number of those who have been convicted of murder—unjustly, in a couple of cases—and of other offences. I do not want to suggest that the Army should be less than rigorous about checking whether men are improperly engaged in activities, detecting them and, if they are found to be involved in illegal activities, subjecting them to the full force of the law. I am, however, disturbed by a recent incident that took place in December not far from my constituency. Three members of the Cookstown company of the UDR were arrested and taken to Gough barracks, where they were interrogated under the prevention of terrorism legislation. They were suspected of involvement in the loyalist terrorist killings that have taken place in recent years in Mid-Ulster.

What was disturbing about the incident was that the fact that these men were being questioned in connection with these crimes was immediately publicised. I do not know who leaked that to the press. It is conceivable that the leak did not come from the Army or from the Northern Ireland Office; but, as the information was leaked to the press not only in Northern Ireland but in London, that suggests that it might have come from the Northern Ireland Office. Leaking the fact that those men had been arrested and questioned in connection with those crimes was as good as fingering them. It would be easy enough for republican sympathisers to discover which men had been arrested. I know for a fact that one of the men who was arrested and subsequently released was, within a matter of days, the target of a terrorist murder attempt.

There being no evidence against the men, they were released. They were entitled to the presumption of innocence, but they were immediately dismissed from the service. Only a few days after their release from Gough barracks, they were told that they had been dismissed and were given less than 24 hours to get their kit out. Thereafter they were for ever barred from entering the UDR base and prevented from joining the UDR ex-service men's association.

If the security forces had reason to believe that men in the service were engaged in terrorist activities, it was quite right to take action against them. I cannot tell whether those men were as pure as the driven snow, but they were entitled to the presumption of innocence. Two factors in the case were distasteful. First, these men had served the community at risk to their own lives—whatever else they had done. For that reason alone they are entitled to a little more consideration than they were given. Secondly, what was the source of the suspicion? I asked the men what they had been questioned about while in custody, thinking that that might provide a clue as to the source of the information. Such information as emerged was exceedingly vague. The suspicion in my mind is that the real source was the east Tyrone brigade of the IRA: the IRA decided to manufacture some suspicions and to feed them, directly or indirectly, through political representatives to the security forces—and then to sit back and laugh while those forces took out three men from the local company.

I should have mentioned earlier that the three men were a corporal, a sergeant and a colour sergeant. They were described to me by officers in the regiment as three of the best men in the company—the sort of men one would like at one's side when in a tight spot. I suspect that, having fed in the information, the IRA sat back laughing while the Army took out three of its best men, disposed of them and disrupted the morale of the unit.

I hope that there was an extremely good reason for doing that. Neither the Minister nor I can judge at the moment. One of the differences between the Regular Army and the UDR—it is noticed and felt by the men—is that when a Regular soldier gets into trouble his comrades and the officers of his regiment rally round and try to help him. If a UDR man gets into trouble, he is thrown out, forgotten about and will not be helped, no matter what his circumstances are. That is a sad contrast and I hope that it will not persist in the new regiment. I hope that the same consideration that is given to Army men will be shown to men serving in the Royal Irish Regiment.

Mr. William Ross: Would my hon. Friend, with his legal experience, care to take this matter a bit further? Supposing one of these people were murdered by the IRA, would his family be able to claim compensation or would they be barred from claiming it on the ground that the man had been suspected of terrorism?

Mr. Trimble: That would depend on the position that the Northern Ireland Office took with regard to the application. What my hon. Friend suggests is theoretically possible, but then one must remember that the Northern Ireland Office is ready to pay compensation not just to persons suspected of terrorism but to persons guilty of terrorism.

As can be seen from what I have said, we have considerable reservations about the merger. We will not divide the House on the issue, and if there is a Division we will vote neither for nor against the proposal so as to reflect our reservations and our desire that the proposal should succeed. We do not want to undermine the morale of a significant element of the security forces. The men feel uneasy and suspicious about the change, but I am sure that those same men will strive to make a good job of this, if they can. Her Majesty's soldiers have a distinguished record for rescuing the Army from bad plans and sometimes from poor generalship.

8 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): I rise to speak feeling sad at heart because I represent many gallant members of the Ulster Defence Regiment who have lived through the most tragic years in the history of our Province. They have operated in dangerous circumstances and continue to do so, facing the enemy daily.

The people of Northern Ireland owe the UDR a deep debt of gratitude. Its soldiers have acted with fortitude and courage and the regiment has earned its place alongside the greatest of British regiments. Its name is revered by every decent law-abiding citizen. Ulster applauds the gallantry, diligence and sacrifice of the UDR and gratefully acknowledges the contribution of all those men and women who have served or are serving in the regiment.

Unlike his counterparts in other British Army regiments, the UDR soldier faces attack not only when he is on duty but when he is at home or, if he is a part-timer, at work, and even during hours of recreation. He faces attack even after his term of service with the regiment ends. He lives within reach of his enemy and is known by the enemy. For the remainder of his life or the duration of the conflict he will be a target. Given that sober reality, people should judge not the UDR but those who denigrate its service. I shall return to that issue.

We must examine exactly why we have reached the present situation. I listened carefully to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), in which he expressed in detail his worries and concerns. Having done that, how can he sit on the sidelines and not vote on this important issue? That is a disservice to the UDR and to the men and women who have served in it over the past 22 years. Every Ulster Member should register the strongest possible protest at the removal of a distinguished regiment which has served the British people of Northern Ireland with great courage and distinction.

I trust that the House will wise up to what it is doing and will reject the proposal to remove the Ulster Defence Regiment from the streets of Northern Ireland. Other issues must be addressed. Hon. Members have paid glowing tributes to the Ulster Defence Regiment. I therefore cannot understand why we should rush to get rid of the regiment before the election. Why is there such undue haste to pass the legislation and ensure the removal of the UDR? Perhaps Her Majesty had an inkling of what the Government intended to do when she came to the Province and put her seal of approval on the UDR—firing a shot, as it were, across the Government's bows. Despite glowing tributes from Her Majesty and from hon. Members, however, we are saying goodbye to the UDR and saying that we do not want it.

Those who do not vote against the Bill are accepting the end of the regiment. If hon. Members believe the glowing tributes to the value of the UDR and believe that the sacrifice that it has made and is making is worth while, they should not allow their names to be associated with the removal of the regiment. It is significant that on the day the Bill was introduced we gathered in the House to hear a statement about the worst monthly figures for many years for murder and other atrocities in the Province. We were told about the atrocities at Teebane and on the Ormeau road. Yet the Government thought that that was a due and proper time to signal to all and sundry that the Ulster Defence Regiment was to cease to exist. The Government will live to regret that signal because the vast majority of those who serve in the regiment think that, once again, it was a signal showing that terrorism and those who parade black propaganda against the security forces in Northern Ireland can succeed. Northern Ireland has been well served by the gallant members of the UDR, and they could give equally gallant service in the future.

We are constantly told that the SDLP is the constitutional party of Northern Ireland. Its members are missing from the debate. They have no reason to come because their electorates are not bothered about the Bill. None of the people who vote for the SDLP or who choose to support it will be annoyed at the removal of the Ulster Defence Regiment. I suppose that SDLP Members are not here because they feel that others will do the dirty work for them and will put the knife in and betray. If the Bill passes into law it will be a gross betrayal of the UDR and those who serve in it. This is a sad day, because it marks the continuation of a policy of appeasement of the enemies of the United Kingdom. The Library reference sheet states:

> "The Army bill 1992 is in part a result of the reductions in the British Army undertaken under 'Options for Change'."

On 23 July 1991, the Secretary of State for Defence announced changes to the British Army structure and a number of amalgamations of regiments. He said:

> "we are taking the opportunity to bring the Ulster Defence Regiment more fully into the Army by merging it with the Royal Irish Rangers. The new regiment will comprise one battalion for worldwide service and up to seven battalions for service in Northern Ireland only".—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1991; Vol. 195, c. 1034.]

In a moment I shall develop the first statement, which is to be found in the House of Commons Library sheet.

The Army Bill 1992 is "in part" a result of the reduction in the British Army. What is the other ingredient? We find an answer in the reference sheet and in another statement issued by Government sources. In 1970, the Ulster Defence Regiment came into existence. Those who can recollect the situation at that time will remember the vilification of the Ulster Special Constabulary and its betrayal by the Government of the day.

There are few hon. Members in the House who can understand the betrayal felt by the people of Northern Ireland when the Ulster Special Constabulary was removed from the streets of Northern Ireland. Until that time, the IRA was held at bay—it was defeated because of the excellent local intelligence and the mode of operations carried on by the local community special constabulary.

As a result of the effectiveness of the USC in deterring IRA operations, nationalist republican politicians and leaders of the Roman Catholic Church agitated against the USC. The Government of the time decided to buy the suggested appeasement policy. That day marked a retrograde step for the safety of my constituents and of the people of Northern Ireland.

We have paid. When I say "we", I mean that the people of Northern Ireland—British subjects in Ulster—have paid a tremendous price in their own blood for that folly, mistake and betrayal. Whether people like it or not, I must say that, had the Ulster Special Constabulary been on the roads now, we would not be standing here, 22 years on, with a worse catalogue of tragedy, murder and destruction than we had at the time.

Consider what happened immediately afterwards. A signal was given then. The IRA accepted the signal that the Government were not willing to take it on and defeat it,

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but would give in to the suggested appeasement. The IRA accepted that signal and its campaign of terror went into top gear.

If anyone needs to know what I am talking about, let him look at the statistics sheet that I have here. It is a graph which shows exactly what happened when the signal was given to the terrorists that the Government were not willing to take them on but bowed to pressure—the vilification and black propaganda used against the Ulster Special Constabulary. In this graph we notice that in 1970 there were 25 murders. Once the signal was given in 1971, there were 174 murders, and in 1972 there were 467 murders. Why? Because of the signal given by the useless Government of the time that they were not willing to take the terrorists on but that appeasement was the policy of the day.

One will never appease terrorists. One has to defeat terrorism and one can only do so with the expertise of local people who know terrorists and who know their hide-outs.

I have great respect for the young men in the other British regiments who come from across the water to Northern Ireland and I know many of them. When they come many of them do not know where they are. Two young men sadly experienced that on the Falls road. They did not know where they were and they went into a crowd of republican supporters. Tragically, they came to a sad and brutal end, as we all remember.

Therefore, it is a serious matter to give a signal to terrorists. That signal was given more than 20 years ago and the Ulster Special Constabulary was removed.

What happened as soon as the Ulster Defence Regiment was born? At the time we were told that the answer was a regiment which was more representative of the community. We were told that the Ulster Special Constabulary was the problem. Get rid of it and we would be well on the way to peace and everyone would accept the alternative. That was until the alternative came about.

So the Ulster Special Constabulary was moved aside and the UDR came in. No sooner was it formed than the agitation recommenced—this time against the UDR. It was no surprise to those of us who knew that appeasement does not pay—but it was a surprise to some—that the agitation came from exactly the same group who had put out black propaganda against the USC. Capitulation and appeasement encouraged greater demands, and agitation for the removal of the UDR started.

Just after that time, I remember driving down the road in my car, listening to an hon. Member of this House—who is missing tonight—on the radio. He had just campaigned for the removal of the USC, saying that it was the worst thing that had ever existed, that we needed a new regiment and that he promised to give it a fair wind. He has told the Minister and us the very same thing in the newspapers, although he is not telling us that today as he is not here. I heard the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) say that the UDR was even worse than the Ulster Special Constabulary. The Government accept that he is one of the "moderates" in a nationalist community. People who live in Ulster were not surprised by the agitation because they know that nationalists have never supported anything which supported Ulster within the United Kingdom.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is it not a fact that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) carried out a continual campaign of vilification of the Ulster Defence Regiment? So much so that no Unionist in the Assembly would sit when he was in the House because, after those attacks, so many men were murdered. A lot of UDR men were murdered at that time.

Rev. William McCrea: I confirm to the House the truth of that statement. Often after the vilification of the UDR by the hon. Member for Newry and Amagh there was an IRA atrocity. The IRA jumped on the bandwagon of that vilification and used it as its excuse to murder Ulster Defence Regiment personnel. The only people who know exactly how hard the people of Ulster took that vilification and how angry they have been are people who have visited and talked to the families in their homes. That situation has carried on until tonight. There has been no let-up in the campaign against the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) who spoke a few moments ago from the Government Back Benches gave us a clear understanding of the vilification and how strong it was. The sad feature is that whenever right hon. and hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies ask Ministers to condemn southern politicians for their meddling interference in the affairs of Northern Ireland, and especially those of the security forces, thus costing the lives of security force personnel, there is always a weak reply. It seems that no rebuke can clearly be given. I do not know what happens behind closed doors, but no encouragement is given to the community when foreign Ministers of a foreign country can vilify the forces of law and order of a part of the United Kingdom and United Kingdom Ministers cannot stand up for them, protest, and rebuke them to their face.

The oxygen for terrorist attacks was once again pumped out in republican propaganda against a body of men and women whose chief crime was to desire the defence of their home and hearth.

In a Library briefing—reference sheet 92/4, page 2, paragraph 4(a)—the UDR has been criticised by Catholics, it appears, for its alleged Protestant bias. These allegations have been supported by the Irish Government, who have called persistently for the UDR's disbandment. More than one third of the population of Northern Ireland is Catholic but Catholics represent only 3 per cent. of the UDR personnel. Surely that begs a question, and similarly it begs an answer. Were there no factors that gave rise to that representation? The answer is no; there are several relevant factors.

The new regiment was opposed from the beginning by the Social Democratic and Labour party. There was no fair wind. The Ulster Special Constabulary was out and a new bandwagon was rolling against the UDR. The Roman Catholic community has an 18 per cent. representation in the regiment and we have been told this evening that instead of a 30 per cent. representation in the Royal Irish Rangers the real figure is 24 per cent. That is close to the 18 per cent. who originally joined the UDR. What happened to reduce 18 per cent. to 3 per cent.? Did those people just disappear? Did they retire? Did they become weary of having to put on a uniform and go out? The answer is no to all those questions.

The truth is that members of the UDR who were Roman Catholics were harassed, harried, abused and ostracised. By whom? Let me answer the question. That was done by the constitutional nationists who sit in the House and by the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, who never once to this very night have supported the UDR and who have never called upon the members of the community to face the terrorists.

It is all very well to sit on the sidelines and criticise. It is lovely to be an armchair general sitting by the fire and having the privilege of criticising everything that is done by the security forces. That is very easy provided that that person does not ask any of his supporters to join the fight and face the terrorists. The members of the Roman Catholic community who joined the UDR—the 18 per cent. of its membership—found themselves ostracised at their place of worship, at their place of work, and within their families. This might be unpalatable to some people but it is the truth. Anyone who does not believe what I am saying should leave his ivory tower.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) talked about the clerical gentlemen in the Province. They should leave their ivory towers and come and see what is actually happening. They should experience what others have gone through. There were Roman Catholic UDR men who could not return to their families. In some instances their families did not want them. That was because they happened to put on the UDR uniform.

My hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) talked about a young Roman Catholic member of the UDR whom he knew well. The undertaker would not bury him. It was necessary to bring in an undertaker from 25 miles away. That young man had committed one sin: he happened to wear the uniform of the UDR. He was murdered by the IRA and he could not be carried in peace to his grave. He was ostracised to the very place of his burial. That is what the 18 per cent. experienced. It is sad that there are some who are not here this evening to answer for their crimes.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that that has happened in police families as well. A sergeant in the town of Newry was murdered by the IRA. What happened? His grave was desecrated. It was opened to receive his body. He could not be buried by the local Roman Catholic Church. He had to be taken to Banbridge. He was a voter in my constituency and I was at the funeral. It took place not in Newry, where the man lived and had his family, but in Banbridge. As I have said, his grave was desecrated.

Rev. William McCrea: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. It must be realised that the majority of those in the Roman Catholic community who put on the uniform of the UDR, or that of the RUC, have to move from their place of residence. They are permitted to return only on certain occasions if their families are happy for them to come home. Only rarely are they allowed to return home to see their families, and only on particular occasions.

The Roman Catholic members of the UDR were pilloried and ostracised by their politicians and their church officials. They discouraged them—and "discouraged" is the mildest word that I can use in the circumstances. The Dublin Government unrelentingly opposed the UDR and used every opportunity to accuse it of being a force of hate against the nationalist community. If they were really interested, some might ask whether the charge made by the Dublin Government and the nationalist representatives was justified. The answer lies in the real statistics.

Since 1970—that is 22 years ago—17 members of the UDR have been convicted of murder. It is right to say that that is 17 too many. It must be remembered, however, that it is being questioned whether four of the 17 were wrongfully convicted and sentenced. So we are down to 13, but 13 out of how many? There must be a proper perspective. The answer is 13 out of the 48,000 men and women who have passed through the ranks of the UDR.

There have been 13 bad apples. If a search was made of all the regiments of the British Army and of all ranks of the police forces throughout the United Kingdom, would there be a ratio equivalent to only 13:48,000? Did the 13 constitute a reason for a campaign of vilification? What did the hon. Member for Foyle say? In the midst of all this vilification and propaganda and Dublin saying that the UDR must be removed, the hon. Member for Foyle had to admit that only 0·28 per cent. of deaths in Northern Ireland troubles were attributable to the Ulster Defence Regiment, which is contrary to the black propaganda pumped out by some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues who are against the UDR. He added:

> "Republican terrorists have killed 250 times as many, but successive Governments are still unfortunately playing around with that bunch of terrorist rats that are responsible for those killings in our Province."

Given that a much higher percentage of deaths were attributed to the rest of the British Army and even to the RUC, why was there no agitation to disband those forces? It is because it would not get a hearing—it would not get a wind. But when black propaganda against the UDR is put out, many run to listen. Also in the official document to which I referred is the statement that "many hundreds" of UDR members have been convicted of lesser offences —but they include even car offences.

My hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, North reminded the House of the Stevens inquiry, and of how all the vans, armoured cars, and machine guns were rolled out to capture UDR men at 6 o'clock in the morning and to bring them in. He did not tell the House of the words of an assistant chief constable, who said that the crime of the few who were found guilty was one of which he, or any of his officers, could have been found guilty at any time during their years of active service in the RUC.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann spoke of an incident in my constituency where, in recent days, three members of the UDR were also treated in a despicable fashion. No charges were brought, but they were thrown out of the UDR and told that they would never again be allowed on a UDR base. Will the Minister explain how the arrest of those three men was reported by the media just a few moments after it occurred? No charges were made against those men, but they were dismissed, and they remain the subject of suspicion.

I will tell the House of an incident involving an IRA man who was returning from the funeral of one of his IRA colleagues. When he was stopped at a checkpoint, he told the soldier on duty, "If you want to know who murdered the man whose funeral I attended today, here are the names." He took a book from the soldier's hand and wrote down the names of those who he said were guilty, and told the soldier to go and get them. We are now seeing IRA evidence behind the movements of certain members of the security forces.

[Rev. William McCrea]

Let us remember the 200 UDR men and women murdered by IRA terrorists. I could show right hon. and hon. Members a photograph taken at a wedding showing the bride, groom, best man, and a bridesmaid. The only one left alive today is the bride. The best man was murdered, the bridesmaid was murdered, and so was the groom. Of that wedding party, only one person remains alive. That is the kind of sacrifice made by people on the border whom the House has decided must go. They were members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. They did not join to travel the world—if they had wanted that, they would have joined other regiments. They joined the UDR to defend their homes and their hearths.

The Minister and others say that the change is being made to improve the regiment's career structure. I assure the Minister that the people in my constituency who joined the UDR did not do so for the sake of their careers, but to allow their kids to enjoy a career—to protect Ulster, and to bring it back to peace and stability so that their children would not have to grow up in the nightmare of terrorism that my kids have known.

My eldest daughter is 18, and not one day of her life has gone by without her witnessing trouble, violence, or tragedy in our Province. UDR men and women put on a uniform, not to have a career themselves, but to ensure that their kids would have the possibility of a career in whatever sphere of life they saw as their vocation.

Two hundred UDR men and women and 44 ex-UDR members have been murdered, and 377 seriously wounded, by IRA terrorists. In a recent attack in my constituency, the headmaster of a school in Castlederg who is a part-time UDR officer was driving to work in the early hours of the morning when he noticed a man walking a dog. It all looked simple. In the providence of God, he happened to look in his rear view mirror, and saw the man with the dog putting a walkie-talkie to his mouth—for he was the IRA scout man. The headmaster, realising that he would probably come under attack, took evasive action —and four gunmen immediately appeared to do him to death. Tonight he is in hospital but, thank God, he survived that murderous attempt.

The UDR has demonstrated its unfailing commitment to the peace of Northern Ireland. Tonight, the sacrifice made by the men and women of the UDR is being thrown back in their faces. The courage of that body of Ulster men and women is beyond words of commendation; yet action is being taken to remove that gallant force, which is urgently needed at a time of one of the bloodiest onslaughts that our Province has ever faced. The decision to remove the UDR at this moment cannot be condemned strongly enough.

The Bill heralds the end not of an era, but of the Ulster Defence Regiment. The Conservative party research department refers to "The End of the UDR," saying:

> "The Bill winds up the UDR at the end of June 1992".

I ask the Minister what happens if the Bill goes through. I trust that it is not a foregone conclusion, as it will not be if there are those who are willing to listen to the argument. But the Benches all around are empty. There is one hon. Member on the Benches of Her Majesty's Opposition for a Bill that could cost the lives of the people of Northern Ireland. That speaks volumes. When the vote comes—and it will come, the House will divide—hon. Members will come out of the woodwork. Why will they vote? Will they vote because they have listened to the arguments or because they believe? No. They will vote because they are told to vote to take out the Ulster Defence Regiment. Talk about voting fodder!

Unfortunately, my constituents will pay the price. There is no doubt that very few of those who vote tonight will ever bother to meet a widow or to speak to a child who will suffer through their decision. It is just a routine, a very costly one.

There is money in the coffers of the UDR that was raised by the people of Ulster for the Ulster defence benevolent fund. It was raised for the UDR because of the sacrifice its members made, and for the widows and children who are left. What happens to that money? Does the UDR get it, or does it go to the new regiment?

We are told in the document that the merger has political advantage. That is the other part of it. It is political—it is a piece of political movement. It is a numbers game, so that the community can be told that it is a more representative regiment. Of course, it will be. There are two parts to the regiment: those who will be travelling the world and the others who will be staying. It will be most interesting to find out what percentage of those who join will be facing the terrorists in Northern Ireland and living in the community. This will be seen exactly. One can fool some of the people some of the time, but about the representatives who are facing the real brunt of this terrorism we shall not be fooled any of the time. Every action will be scrutinised.

Unfortunately, tonight the decision will be taken and it will mean the demise of one of the most gallant regiments that has ever faced a foe—a regiment which, had it been given the tools and the support, could already have finished the job on behalf of all the services of the United Kingdom.

8.44 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The need to have local people involved in local security forces in a terrorist situation is admitted by anyone who has ever taken the most casual glance at the terrorist organisations that have been faced not only by our own armed forces but by many others throughout the world. I believe that it would also be accepted that it is those local forces that do the most necessary work of building confidence in the communities in which they live and move, rather than the regular armed forces of either the state in question or an outside state coming in to help.

The Minister today agreed with that. He said that the Army and the RUC could not do the job without the Ulster Defence Regiment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *indicated assent.*

Mr. Ross: I am glad to see that he indicates assent to my words, because it means that he recognises with great clarity that the UDR is an absolutely vital component if the IRA is to be defeated and peace restored.

It is because the Minister has given certain assurances about the new regiment that, while we are not overjoyed, to put it mildly, by the appearance of the Bill, we are unwilling to vote against it, for that would send a signal to many members of the UDR that would not be completely accurate. But we shall certainly be keeping a fairly close eye on the situation to see whether the assurances that have been given are fully honoured, not only in the immediate future, but in the long term.

The question has always been what sort of a force is needed to defeat a terrorist organisation and how it should be structured, trained and used. What is the job to be done by the UDR in Northern Ireland?

I am one of the few Members in this House who served in the Ulster Special Constabulary. I lived, and still live, in a nationalist area. Like the rest of that organisation, I was subject to a massive campaign of vilification, which had more to do with the vapours of Irish republicanism than with reality.

Unfortunately, it was not only the House that believed those stories. There was a weakness in the Stormont Parliament at that time, which allowed that force to be disbanded. There are those who say to me now that we could never have stopped the IRA at its present level, but the reality is that it was not at its present level at that time. I believe that, if that force had been used fully and comprehensively, the IRA would never have become the force that it is today.

I was proud to serve in that force. I recall very clearly even to this day the bitter resentment that I and many thousands of others who served felt—the resentment that I still feel and will carry to my grave. I will never forgive those who did that to the force of which I was a member. I am concerned this evening that there are those in the UDR who, if the assurances given are not honoured, will have the same feeling of bitterness against the Minister.

The UDR was raised initially to be locally based. It was supposed to be able to attract a large number of Roman Catholics. I do not want to rehearse all that has been said in this debate, but I hope that hon. Members who take a real interest in the security position in Northern Ireland and want to refresh their memories will read *Hansard* slowly and carefully.

We are told that, in the early days, the UDR was a representative force, but there are a great many Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland who are simply Republicans, and there is no way that any Republican could ever join a force which was designed to maintain the union. It was therefore representative of the Unionist population of Northern Ireland in the widest sense rather than of Protestants and Roman Catholics. That should be borne in mind.

The force was immediately attacked by the enemies of the Union, and it has been attacked by them right up to the present day. The Stevens inquiry was another sign of weakness, and it was one of the most foolish episodes with which we have ever had to live. It is the Government's job to keep the activities of the armed forces of the Crown under control, but the Nelson case—that whole strange episode involving Army intelligence—has left more questions in its wake than have yet been answered.

Anyone who thinks that, in a climate of terrorism, an agent can be put into any terrorist organisation and expected to have clean hands and live is a fool of the highest order. It simply cannot be done. I hope that, with the ending of that case, the intelligence network that is used against terrorists in Northern Ireland will be sorted out once and for all—that in future it will be controlled comprehensively and centrally, and properly run.

In his opening speech, to which I listened very carefully, the Minister said that changes had taken place in the force since its formation. Those changes have, among other things, moved the force away from its former local character, which was one of the greatest strengths of the old B force. Slowly but surely, it was given more of a Regular Army structure. We had the part-timers; then we had the full-timers—the permanent cadre; now we have the nonsense about career prospects.

As the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) pointed out so clearly and forcefully, people do not join the UDR for a career; if they want a military career, they will go into the regular military forces. As soon as terrorism disappears, the UDR will shrink radically, and will probably disappear. The Minister knows that perfectly well. Most people who join the UDR join with the aim of defeating the terrorist organisation that is the source of the evil—the Provisional Irish Republican Army.

I listened with astonishment when the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland told the House last Thursday that some 40 to 50 per cent. of those who are now being charged have no previous terrorist trace—in other words, that intelligence has not traced them in such a connection, and they have not been picked up before. Knowing the right hon. Gentleman as I do, I have no doubt that that is perfectly true, but it is still a very misleading statement to make in the House.

The general public will have been given the impression that the intelligence organisations of the security forces know about only 40 to 50 per cent. of active IRA men. That is highly inaccurate. Most of those who are charged are very new members of the IRA; they have not been charged before, because they have only just come to the attention of the police, and, given the psychological pressures that can now be exerted in the course of cross-examination, greenhorns will break. When the police arrest a dedicated, experienced gunman, they keep him sitting there for seven days, and then he walks out of the door and waves goodbye—until he is next picked up. He does not break.

The vast majority of those who are charged with and convicted of IRA and other terrorist activities are relative newcomers. The truth is that police intelligence in regard to the IRA is very good: the police have a very clear idea of the identity of most of the leading players.

The proposed change in the UDR takes us further down the road to an apparently ideal situation in which we have—as the Minister told us—a more professional force. I shall return to that word "professional". In reality, however, the essential nature of the force will remain the same: it will be a locally recruited and locally used force.

The change is portrayed as an attempt to introduce more Roman Catholics into the force. That is nonsense. If the Government are trying to confuse people by bandying statistics, they can forget it. People in Northern Ireland are not that stupid: the Unionist population are not that stupid, and I can tell the Minister that the republican element—including the IRA—are not either. They know perfectly well, as my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) pointed out—they will read *Hansard* tomorrow, too—that 24 per cent. of the Regular Army who are members of the Royal Irish Rangers are Roman Catholics. When the merger takes place, that proportion will be a sight less.

As the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster pointed out, the proportion of Roman Catholics in the locally used and recruited force—those who will be active on the roads—will not rise very much, unless they are drafted in from the

[Mr. Ross]

Regular Army; and the chances are that those who are now in the Regular Army did not join to spend their time on the roads of Northern Ireland. They joined to find a military career which would take them wherever the British Army went. Let us have a bit of honesty.

Let the Government not forget that the IRA says that it wants the British and their supporters out of Ireland. That was made clear to me again very recently. The same applies to Sinn Fein and its fellow travellers. In fact, I believe that members of Sinn Fein have to be members of the IRA, because, as it is the IRA army command that runs the outfit, their orders will not be taken if they are not members. The supporters to whom I refer include those sitting on these Benches, and the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster. They include every Unionist who votes for the Union. The IRA is not interested in getting out British soldiers alone; it is interested in getting the British out, and the British are those who say that they are British—which means all of us.

The Minister said today that he wanted the part-timers retained. He said that they were an important element. They are more than that: they are the essential link—the living, vital link—with the local community from which they come. They are perhaps the most essential element in the whole structure. Without them, there is no UDR—no locally recruited and locally used force; there is a Regular Army force which is used in the area of recruitment, and that is a different animal.

There must be an easy way for UDR part-timers to join. There must be a relatively short-period of training, because they will lose their jobs if they stay away for too long. There must be no great change from the present conditions on which part-timers join, or they will not be there any more.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *indicated assent.*

Mr. Ross: The Minister indicates assent. I am glad, because that means that he understands what we have been trying to say this evening.

These people should not be shifted from one end of the Province to the other; so far as is humanly possible, they should be used in their own immediate areas. That was the strength of the B force, and it is the real strength of the UDR part-timers—local men used among people they know.

I do not want to see part-timers brought into the force and then used for guard duties only. Men will not join to do guard duty. This time I do not see from the Government Front Bench assent to what I am saying, but I hope that, before I finish, that assent will be forthcoming. Those men need to be out on the road, and I hope that the Minister will be prepared to give me a guarantee that the part-timers will be used in that way. It is out on the road that they are most useful. People who know that they would not be used in that way simply will not join.

The Ulster Defence Regiment needs Northern Ireland officers—people born and brought up in Northern Ireland, people who know the local community, who know what has to be done, who know the sort of force they are dealing with. Any Regular Army officer who comes to the UDR must suffer a fair degree of cultural shock. UDR officers, as well as men on the ground, need training in anti-terrorist techniques. Combating terrorism is their main role in life. Such people do not expect ever to face a Russian armoured attack on the north German plain; they are expected to deal with a gunman with a hidden gun in a back street, or a man with a bomb lying behind a hedge. It is a different world and a different job. That is the kind of activity on which their training should have concentrated in the past. I hope it was, and I hope that it will be so concentrated in the future.

We need a close interface with the RUC. The concept of the RUC as the leading body in the fight against the IRA must be tied very tightly into the whole anti-terrorist structure. The hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson), as always when we are dealing with Northern Ireland affairs, made an excellent speech. I am sorry that he has left the Chamber, and I am far more sorry that in a few weeks' time he will cease to be a Member. He has been a steadfast friend of Ulster, and, in respect of Northern Ireland matters, one of the few sane voices among Great Britain Members.

In an excellent speech the hon. Gentleman drew attention to the unique position occupied by the Greenfinches in the UDR. The unique nature of the Greenfinches underlines the unique nature of the UDR. The regiment developed from highly suspicious beginnings. In my view, it was a sop to the Unionist community. It changed and developed to meet the developing situation, and the Greenfinches were part of the change and the development. The UDR exists only because, 22 or 23 years ago, the Government got the security needs of the security situation wrong. At that time, they did not give any weight to Unionist opinion. I hope that they will now start to give weight to that opinion.

There is a very real and dangerous job to be done. The structure of the forces must be right, and I hope that the Government are getting it right. The training too must be right, as must the interface with the police. I said earlier that I had listened intently to the Minister when he talked about a more professional military body. It is all very well to talk about a more professional military body if one is facing an enemy in the Gulf, as happened last year, or dealing with a Russian armoured attack on the north German plain—which, thank God, it seems we shall never now have to do. But here we are dealing with a different situation, and the UDR must be more than a professional military body.

It has to provide an interface with the people on the ground, with the terrorists and with the police. It has to act as a back-up for the police, and do all these other things. I have always thought that what we in Northern Ireland need is something more like a police force than an Army force locally recruited. However, the Government have chosen not to go down that road. For 20 years, they have gone down another road. If there is to be a change, I hope that it will take account of some of our criticisms.

I believe that the IRA can be defeated, and the people in the UDR believe that the IRA can be defeated. But the Government have a part to play in the defeat. The views of my party and of the Democratic Unionist party have been put fairly forcefully to the Prime Minister and to Northern Ireland Ministers—not least during the past few weeks. I hope that what we are saying will be taken on board. If it is clearly recognised that the UDR is a unique force, and that the job that must be done by the locally recruited security forces in Northern Ireland is a unique and vital component in the whole anti-terrorist operation, perhaps wisdom will prevail and we shall see the force steadily improve in its capacity to deal with terrorism.

I hope and pray that the Government have got it right. If not, the fair wind that everybody is trying to give the Government at present in respect of security will be to no avail, and we shall pay a very heavy price. It is always very difficult to reverse a mistake.

9.4 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): Any Bill designed to create a Royal Irish Regiment out of the Royal Irish Rangers and the Ulster Defence Regiment must start by paying a great compliment to those who have served in the two regiments. The sacrifice made by not only serving personnel but those who have retired from the regiments is very unusual. Such personnel find that their family, their social lives and everything they do in their business are affected by their membership of the regiment in which they have served. There is no doubt that those who have served have made a supreme commitment to the Union of Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

When we heard what the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) said about people who live on the border and the extent to which their lives were in jeopardy, we became aware of the sacrifices that they make, in that they are liable to be killed at any time and to have their families executed because of the way in which they have supported the Union.

When considering the problems, we must be clear about the fact that the people of Northern Ireland are being intimidated into staying away from the border areas. As many hon. Members as possible should visit Northern Ireland and stay for at least a weekend to experience some of the problems. I do not think that hon. Members fully understand and appreciate the problems that their colleagues in Northern Ireland have to face when visiting the homes of their constituents to commiserate with parents for the sacrifices made by sons and daughters on behalf of the Union.

The border areas come under much heavier pressure than any other area because terrorists seem determined to exclude any opposition in those areas so that they have free access back and forth across the border. If there is any limitation of that access, they feel threatened, as happened recently when a brave man was able, off duty, to use his weapon and to claim the life of one of the terrorists who was trying to take his life. Terrorists are trying completely to clear the area so that they have free access. When I was there, I had the unfortunate experience of visiting with a Northern Ireland colleague the family of someone who had been murdered the previous day. It is a very sobering experience to see what our colleagues with constituencies in Northern Ireland have to cope with.

We should compliment our colleagues because they are also in considerable danger whenever they are in Northern Ireland. They have to undertake an enormous amount of security discipline. Their own families are very much at risk. Some of our colleagues have been killed by terrorists —that is a real threat—so their advice bureaux and all the other constituency work that they undertake in the Province have that additional dimension. We must, therefore, respect and have special regard for what they say.

I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross). I have particular respect for him and for the knowledge that he acquired as a member of the Ulster special constabulary. Its members, with their very detailed knowledge of the ground that they covered and where the trouble points were likely to be, were able to keep a much closer eye on the people of the area than the security forces can do today. Even if members of the security forces are there for two years, they do not really get to know the people and the area in the same way as members of the special constabulary knew those with whom they went to school and grew up.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East was right when he went on to mention the need for anti-terrorist techniques and said that there is a special requirement for any force that operates in Northern Ireland. It is not the same technique that is required when one is preparing to defend the central plains of Europe. That does not mean to say that professional people are unable to acquire those skills, provided they have sufficient training to enable them to do so.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) thinks that the Bill is insensitive. I appreciate and understand his concern about the loss of the word "Ulster", but I point out to him that whenever one introduces a Bill of this sort it will be the wrong time and that whatever one tries to do there is bound to be some event in that period that makes it a bad time for such an announcement. We must grasp the nettle. If we believe that it is necessary to do something, the decision to do it must be taken.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) mentioned those who, having been made redundant, might be recruited from elsewhere in the British forces and he hoped that those who had old scores to settle would not take advantage of the opportunity to enter the Royal Irish Regiment. I think that his fears are unfounded, and I hope that a considerable number of people will be prepared to share some of their valuable experience by serving in this regiment.

Effectiveness of security arrangements and the rule of law are essential ingredients in what we are trying to achieve in this area. They must be extremely high on our list of priorities.

I welcome the Bill because I have found, from my experience as a member of the Select Committee on Defence and from meeting many members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, that members of the UDR are looking for a proper career structure. The Bill will give them that opportunity. It will give a variety of which they can take much greater advantage. When the Ulster Defence Regiment was first set up, it was believed that it would be on a part-time reserve basis; now, about 50 per cent. form part of a permanent cadre. So the situation has undoubtedly changed over the life of the regiment.

The regiment has performed extraordinarily well. I am not one of those who criticise it because of the number of bad apples that it has had—bad apples can be found in any group of people. Fourteen, even out of so many, is an unfortunate figure, but one has to accept it. The rest of the people play a very valuable and important role.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that there are other good reasons for changing the structure. The opportunity to introduce British, Irish and Commonwealth citizens for recruitment instead of just British citizens is important. As other hon. Members have

[Mr. Neil Thorne]

said, we hope that that will provide an opportunity for greater Roman Catholic involvement. I know that fears have been expressed, and it has been said, that when the Ulster Defence Regiment was first set up, it had many more Roman Catholics, but some of those have now left. I hope that we can introduce a new impetus in that direction, although I realise that as the Irish Republic becomes more prosperous we may not find it quite so easy to obtain recruits from the south as we have done in the past. Undoubtedly, the European Community has a lot to do with that.

We need to bring the personnel of the UDR into the structure of the rest of the Army. The correct and proper way to do that is through the creation of a new regiment —the Royal Irish Regiment. I strongly support the Bill.

9.16 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): Yesterday I re-read the debates that we had in the House in 1969 on the establishment of the Ulster Defence Regiment. The Committee stage of the Ulster Defence Regiment Bill was taken on the Floor of the House, and the Minister in charge was the present deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). I was a spokesman for the Conservative Opposition.

A hostile amendment to cut the proposed strength of the regiment from 6,000 to 4,000 was moved by the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), and 25 hon. Members supported it. The mover of the amendment became chairman of the parliamentary Labour party. Of the supporters of the amendment, one—the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot)—became leader of the Labour party; one—the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel)—became leader of the Liberal party; and one—the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) —is now the principal official Opposition spokesman on Northern Ireland.

During that long debate, which ran from 7 pm until 9.30 the following morning, the Conservative party and, of course, the Ulster Unionists, invariably supported the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook against the criticisms of the present principal Labour spokesman on Northern Ireland.

I recall that some Labour party rebels, including the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, argued that the new Ulster Defence Regiment was bound to become a replica of the B Specials. I then said:

> "It seems to me inconceivable that in the foreseeable future any Minister at the Department"—

the Ministry of Defence—

> "will not want the regiment to reflect a proper balance of the communities in Northern Ireland . . . If it is 100 per cent. sectarian, it can only be because one section of the community chooses not to come forward."—[*Official Report*, 1 December 1969; Vol. 792, c. 1149.]

As many hon. Members have reminded us, when the UDR was set up many Catholics came forward, and 18 per cent. of the regiment were Catholics. Their numbers soon dwindled for reasons forcefully pointed out to us by the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea). It is ironic that, in the debate on the setting up of the UDR, the attack on that regiment was led by the then hon. Member for Mid-Ulster, Bernadette Devlin. I hope that she will read the forceful words of the present hon. Member for Mid-Ulster.

Catholic UDR members were attacked at home and Catholic recruitment could have been maintained only if the political leaders of the constitutional parties who drew their main strength from the Catholic community had issued an unequivocal call to young Catholic men and women to join the regiment. Sadly, that call never came.

When the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed, I once again hoped that part of the price paid would be an unequivocal call from the leaders of the Social Democratic and Labour party and from other leaders of the Catholic community for young men and women from that community to join the UDR and the security forces. One might have hoped that the leaders of the SDLP would be here and might have given a word of encouragement even at this late hour for members of their community to join the new regiment. Sadly, that has not happened and I now wonder whether it can ever happen.

We must all hope that the new regiment will play a leading role in protecting the whole population of Northern Ireland. I tend to agree with the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross). The whole question of intelligence and of intelligence gathering is more important than regimental organisation. The key to success now, as it has been, is not increased patrols on the streets of Belfast, although that may help to relieve the fears of the public. If we really want to stop the terrorists, it means more tapped telephones, more electronic surveillance—or bugging, to put it more bluntly—more interrogation of suspects, and more use of informers and double agents. The intelligence world is bound to be untidy, but the recent trial in Belfast suggests that, at the least, co-ordination could be improved.

The disturbances and killings in recent weeks have underlined and strengthened the argument which some of us have put forward in recent months that "Options for Change" and the reduction of the strength of the infantry in the British Army has gone too far. I have consistently argued that the cuts in the infantry battalions are too deep and that the main threat that we face comes from the sort of low intensity operations in which we are embroiled on the streets of Belfast and in the villages of south Armagh.

The Conservative party's defence policy is infinitely superior to that put forward by our principal opponents. The upsurge of sectarian murders and the calls for yet more soldiers to be sent to the Province illustrate the problem of overstretch that we have all been discussing. There is a real danger of battalions having to go to Northern Ireland ever more frequently. I hope, therefore, that after the general election a new team of Conservative defence Ministers will look again at that argument.

I understand that in a few moments the House is to divide on the merger of the regiments, but I am sure that there is no division in the House on the debt that we owe to the men and women of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the brave way in which they have served the whole community of Northern Ireland in the past 22 years since we set up that regiment.

9.26 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I shall be interested to know which way the hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) intends to vote. He went to great lengths to show how he has supported the Ulster Defence Regiment over the years and also went out of his way to liken his strength of feeling with that expressed by Democratic Unionist Members. I shall be interested to know whether he will follow their suit if a Division is called and vote against the Second Reading of the Bill.

We intend to do as my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) said at the outset of the debate—to give the Government our full support on the Bill's Second Reading.

I have heard bits of all the speeches. I have left the Chamber from time to time, but I shall not fall into the trap, as an hon. Friend did last week, of giving the reasons why I had to do so. Suffice it to say that I have the full flavour of the debate. I shall respond to some of the points that have been raised.

First, I thank the Minister for introducing the debate with such clarity and for taking us through the Bill so closely. Although the Bill is not long, even the Ministry of Defence did not feel that a statutory basis was required to change the position of the Ulster Defence Regiment. The Minister's speech shows how quickly he and his civil servants have learnt what all the clauses stand for and what the changes are likely to be.

The Minister has our total support on two of the points that he made. He says that the Government are absolutely committed to upholding the rule of law and police primacy in Northern Ireland. Clearly, there is a bipartisan position on that commitment. Perhaps he could have a word with the hon. Member for Beckenham, as there appeared to be some disagreement on that point.

Sir Philip Goodhart: My right hon. Friend explained the Bill, which I shall support, with great clarity and force.

Mr. Marshall: I am pleased to hear that we agree on the word "clarity", if nothing else.

If we felt that the proposed amalgamation would undermine the fight against terrorism in the Province, we would not support the Bill. It is because the Labour party feels that the proposed amalgamation will strengthen the security forces in assisting the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the fight against terrorism that we shall vote for the Bill, if a Division takes place.

In his initial remarks, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) seemed to be trying to cause dissension and perhaps jealousy among spokespersons of the official Opposition. The right hon. Gentleman congratulated my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North on his balanced representation of the official Opposition views on the Bill. I believe that, when the official Opposition speak on affairs affecting the Province, we always present a balanced view. Can the right hon. Gentleman name occasions and give examples when any official Opposition spokesperson speaking on Northern Ireland affairs has ever expressed anything other than a balanced view? The right hon. Gentleman may sometimes have disagreed with our views, but that does not mean that they were not presented in a fair and balanced way.

Mr. Molyneaux: It is true that from time to time the views of the Labour party's Front-Bench spokesmen on Northern Ireland matters do not find a ready response from the Ulster Unionist party or the Democratic Unionist party. I was paying compliments to those on the Opposition Front Bench, but I hope that my comments will not damage their electoral prospects.

Mr. Marshall: I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that he will not damage our prospects.

On a more serious point, the right hon. Gentleman expressed some pessimism as to whether the enrolment of Catholics in the new regiment would be at the same level as it now is in the Royal Irish Rangers. Although I accept that there are grounds for his pessimism, I hope that we share the feeling that more Catholics would think it worth while serving in the new regiment if we could provide the protection required to increase their ratio. Despite the right hon. Gentleman's pessimism, I hope that that is something that we both wish to see, and I hope that it will happen.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley also said that he hoped that amalgamation would not be used to weaken the contribution of locally recruited soldiers. I certainly agree with him on that, and I hope that the Minister will assure us on that point.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) and the House will not be surprised to hear that, once again, I totally disagree with everything that he said. He appeared to be advancing the view that the Bill was part of some grand conspiracy to undermine the Ulster Defence Regiment and to destabilise the security position in Northern Ireland. I totally disagree, and I am sure that the vast majority of hon. Members disagree too.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not like to leave the House with the idea that he had disagreed with my remarks about the gallantry of the Roman Catholic members of the UDR and the sorrow brought to the families to whom I referred.

Mr. Marshall: I certainly do not disagree with those remarks. Later, if I have time, I shall add my praise and sorrow for those groups. But the hon. Gentleman's main political point was that the Bill is part of a grand conspiracy to undermine the UDR and further destabilise security in Northern Ireland. That is quite wrong, and the hon. Gentleman does a great disservice to everyone in Northern Ireland by continuing to advance that view.

The amalgamation cannot be interpreted as a sign of weakness. It does not amaze me that the hon. Member for Antrim, North should seek to introduce the Anglo-Irish Agreement to the debate. This measure cannot be interpreted as arising from the influence of the Irish Government. The need for amalgamation and reorganisation stems from the requirement to review the overall defence needs of the United Kingdom and to examine security requirements in the Province and the role of the Royal Irish Regiment in them.

I agreed with the opening remarks of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who said that he and his party would judge the Bill by the effectiveness of security arrangements in the Province after amalgamation. I agree with that; I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman and his party concluded that they would not support the Bill if they had any doubts about the effectiveness of those arrangements after amalgamation. We take the same line.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) will be pleased to know that I agreed with at least two of his points. For perhaps the first time in the past 22 years, the

[Mr. Marshall]

point was made that more Ulster Catholics are involved in the fight against terrorism than are involved in terrorism. Without over-generalising, that at least shows that there are hundreds of thousands of people in the nationalist community who are just as determined as the majority community that terrorism is not the way to bring about political change.

After amalgamation, if there are proposed changes in the operational role of battalions based only in Northern Ireland, will the Minister give us some idea of what such changes might involve by comparison with the UDR's role today?

My old adversary, the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea), claimed that amalgamation is likely to besmirch the name of the UDR and in some way diminishes the valour of past and present members of it. I believe that I can carry the whole House with me by disagreeing with that. Members of all parties have paid tribute to the bravery and courage of the UDR, whose members will still have a leading part to play in the defence of the Province, in the fight against terrorism and as part of the new regiment.

I take offence when words like appeasement and betrayal are bandied about so freely in this House by an hon. Member. I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that the legislation does not appease terrorists. It does not betray the people of the Province or hand them to terrorists. We support it because it shows the terrorists that when change to the security forces is required we are prepared to support it so that the fight against terrorism can be carried on far better than it has been in the past. The hon. Gentleman should be a little more careful about his use of words such as appeasement and betrayal.

Rev. William McCrea: The hon. Gentleman can take it from me that many people who have served in the UDR believe that the Bill is a betrayal of all their sacrifices.

Mr. Marshall: I am not at all surprised that some people feel like that. Perhaps it is because of their sense of identification with the Ulster Defence Regiment. Those feelings are misplaced and I cannot help feeling that they are engendered by some of the public remarks of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends. *[Interruption.]* We all wish to see a reduction in terrorist activity in the Province, and the majority of hon. Members agree that the Bill is a step forward in the fight against terrorists. Hopefully, it will lead to a reduction in terrorist activity.

I repeat that we recognise the courage, dedication and sense of duty that have led to so many people in the Province joining the Ulster Defence Regiment and assisting the RUC and other elements of the British Army in the fight against terrorism. We pay tribute to their bravery, and honour the hundreds of people who have died and those who have been injured in the fight against terrorism.

At a time of tremendous change in defence requirements, not just in the United Kingdom but throughout the world, it is inevitable that the UDR cannot stand isolated and immune from change. That does not indicate any weakening of our resolve to combat terrorism. On the contrary, I hope, and I think it is a shared hope, that the successor regiment to the UDR and the Royal Irish Rangers will be in the forefront in assisting the RUC in the continuing fight against terrorism from whichever quarter it springs.

The Bill is a step forward. We all recognise the difficulties that the UDR has faced in recruiting people from the minority community, and I do not wish to rehearse those arguments again. Whether one likes it or not, to some extent—I put it no higher than that—that has helped to alienate the UDR from the minority community. Our hope, which must be shared by all parties, is that the new regiment will be able to continue the tradition of the Royal Irish Rangers, which was able to recruit a much higher percentage of Catholics than the UDR. My view, and I think that of my party, is that if that were to happen the make-up of the new regiment would be more representative of the Province as a whole.

As the Minister said, the amalgamation will produce a less isolated, better trained and more professional force. I was pleased to hear that the Government intend to proceed with their earlier suggestion that individual soldiers will be switched between the general battalions and the home-based battalions. I hope that many hundreds of members of the new regiment will take advantage of that, because it offers great experience and will increase their professional opportunities.

The amalgamation must be genuine and not simply the absorption of one regiment by another. In forging a new identity it must absorb the best traditions of the Royal Irish Rangers and the Ulster Defence Regiment. We believe that it will and we wish it well.

9.45 pm

Mr. Archie Hamilton: With the leave of the House, I must say that this has been a spirited debate and I much appreciate the support that we have had from both Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) mentioned 750 redundancies in the regiment. He was referring to the amalgamation of the two regular battalions of the Royal Irish Rangers. He deduced from that that there would be 750 redundancies. Natural wastage will take place to some degree, so we would not expect that number. I would not want anyone to get the impression that the reductions in numbers in the Regular Army will affect the UDR. We do not envisage the members of the home service battalions being affected by that measure.

We are working on an enhanced resettlement package, which would read across to the Army and would be available to anyone who was made redundant. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be able to make an announcement about that in the not-too-distant future.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) told us about three of his constituents who were forced out of the UDR on the ground that they were Catholics and were coming under enormous pressure locally. He also went on to tell us about the great dangers for UDR recruits who live near the border with the Republic. I certainly accept that. I must admit that those who joined up showed enormous courage and it is a great tragedy that there is such a small percentage of Roman Catholics in the UDR. The right hon. Gentleman asked whether the price of amalgamation was the abandonment of the UDR's role in Northern Ireland. I can say categorically that that is not the case. We are doing this because we value the role that the UDR plays in Northern Ireland and we want that role to continue.

However, we must constantly remind ourselves that the basic reasons for what we are doing are military. We are saying that we want a more professional, better trained number of people in the home service battalions. Once we start to go down the road of saying that the main reason is to recruit more Catholics or to provide a sop to the Dublin Government, we are all over the place. The main reasons are military. We believe that as a result we shall have more professional soldiers, who will have greater opportunities. It is important to remember that that is the rationale of what we are trying to do. If we go down the road of being concerned about other issues, we shall be badly diverted from the main point.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley was also worried that training would be increased to a level where part-timers would not be able to keep up. He had a reservation about that. Today the training of part-timers has to be dealt with with enormous sensitivity by commanding officers. We realise that some people are available and can take off blocks of days for training. Other part-timers in the UDR are not able to do so. It is not our intention to work some surreptitious scheme to get rid of part-timers. We very much value them. For those who can make the time available, there will be opportunities to train on the mainland. The general view is that the soldiers would enjoy the opportunity to go to the mainland—where they would have different training facilities—and that they will probably be safer while they are there than they would be in Northern Ireland. A soldier will also be able to choose to serve in Northern Ireland, without any prejudice to his career. I can certainly give the right hon. Gentleman that undertaking.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley is also concerned about the period of notice. I understand his concern about the possibility of changes to notice arrangements which currently apply to members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. Under current plans, which we shall need to reflect in the new regulations, there will be no change in the ability of a part-timer to give a month's notice of termination of service. That is important. Conditions of service covering the notice that a part-timer gives will remain as they are now.

As regards the permanent cadre, we have in mind that they should in future serve on engagements closer to those of the rest of the Army. That would involve a notice period of a year. As I said in my opening remarks, where there are special circumstances justifying a more rapid departure from the home service battalions, I would not expect there to be any problem in practice. These arrangements exist in the Regular Army and they will be used where necessary in the new regiment. If there are security reasons that mean that someone has to leave quickly, we shall be in a position to allow that to happen. In those circumstances, a commanding officer will not say, "No, we need a year's notice and you must stay in."

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley was concerned also about advertising for recruits and whether advertising for recruits was continuing. I can give him undertakings. In the financial year 1990-91, £110,000 was allocated and spent on UDR recruitment. There was advertising in newspapers and magazines, and occasionally on television. Recruitment is aimed generally at bringing in both full-time and part-time members, but on occasions it is directed specifically at either category. In the financial year 1991-92, £110,000 has again been allocated. Additional funds may be available to launch the new regiment. It is not possible to separate expenditure between that directed towards the permanent cadre and that which is aimed at part-time recruitment. Basically, it is normally aimed at both.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about members of home service battlions being forced to serve away from local areas and made a valuable point on local knowledge and its importance in the fight against terrorism. We greatly value the contribution of part-timers and the local knowledge that they can offer. The terms of service of part-timers remain substantially as they are now. There are no plans to post part-timers away from local areas.

The permanent cadre must be able to see a full and professional career for its members in service in the British Army. The military authorities will consider carefully the need for postings against the need to maintain local knowledge. There will be a balance to be struck. I do not expect any postings away from home battalions to be on a substantial scale, but they may take place occasionally if, for example, there is a need to make up for a recruiting shortfall in a particular area.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) told us a terrible story about an undertaker who would not bury a UDR Roman Catholic soldier who had been killed. He described the terrible feelings of the man's family and said that a hearse had to come from some 25 miles away. It was an awful story and indicative of the problems that so many brave young soldiers faced when they joined the UDR at the beginning. The hon. Gentleman asked for a guarantee that everyone who is in the UDR will be entitled to join the new regiment. I think that I can give him that. I think that I can say that anybody who is part of the UDR at the end of June will be offered a place in the new regiment. I believe that I have dealt with the opportunities to resign.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North asked about the closure of UDR bases. The bases and locations from which the security forces operate are, as the House knows, constantly reviewed. We are examining the locations from which the home service battalions will operate most effectively in future. Any changes will be designed to ensure the continuation of a strong security force presence throughout the Province. The bases are not free-standing locations but part of a central pattern of operating bases throughout the Province. We should not feel that the amalgamation will be a reason to start closing bases. As I have said, they are constantly under review. The hon. Gentleman will know that bases have been closed in the past and new ones opened.

The hon. Members for Antrim, North, for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) wanted to know what would happen to the UDR benevolent fund when the amalgamation has taken place. The fund is a registered charity which provides valuable support in the form of loans, grants and other welfare support to current and former members of the UDR and their families. It depends on voluntary contributions. Full arrangements for its administration after the merger have not been decided. I can confirm, however, that there are no plans for it to be wound up. It will continue to be available to provide assistance to those whom it helps now.

Mr. Molyneaux: Can the Minister confirm the suggestion in the Library briefing paper that the new headquarters will be in Ballykinler? Also—this may be dealt with in the regulations—is it the intention to harmonise the housing allowances for full time UDR members with those paid in the Regular Army?

Mr. Hamilton: One of the problems that we have had throughout this debate is the briefing from the House of Commons Library. The Government are not responsible for that briefing, and it is made clear on the front of that document that it is independently produced. I do not think that all the information that it contains is quite accurate—including the percentage of Catholics in the Royal Irish Rangers. I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman an undertaking in respect of Ballykinler. Decisions are being made, but no conclusion has yet been reached.

As to help with housing, I do not see a substantial difference from the situation that the UDR enjoys today. Most of its members are not in the same position as those of the Regular Army, who have married quarters, and so on. Fundamentally, we will see much the same terms and conditions of employment as exist today.

A number of right hon. and hon. Members spoke of the gradual decline in the number of part-timers serving in the UDR. In recent years, increasing operational demands have been placed on the regiment and, as a result, the original part-time force has been transformed into one that is half part-time and half full-time, permanent cadre soldiers.

With the gradual increase in the permanent cadre, it appears that the community has increasingly seen the UDR's task as one for full-time, professional soldiers. Fewer part-time recruits have come forward, and there has been a gradual decrease in the strength of the UDR's part-time element. That has occurred through natural wastage over the years, and we expect that trend to continue. There is no policy to cut the number of part-time UDR soldiers.

The UDR's part-time element continues to fulfil an extremely valuable role in supporting the RUC in the fight against terrorism. There are no plans to disband the part-time UDR or to change its role. As I mentioned earlier, we are very grateful for the surge capability that it offers, when it comes to calling up the UDR's part-time element in extreme terrorist situations.

Mr. Kilfedder: Can the Minister give an assurance that there will be advertising in Northern Ireland to encourage people to come forward to serve in a part-time capacity?

Mr. Hamilton: I thought that I had already dealt with that question. We have the same advertising budget as last year. It is aimed at recruiting permanent cadre and part-time UDR members, and will appear in newspapers and on television.

I take the point made by the hon. Member for Antrim, North that people did not join the UDR to become Regular soldiers. When the regiment was formed, its members thought that they were joining a reserve. At the beginning, the percentages were 10 per cent. permanent cadre and 90 per cent. part-timers. The part-timers thought that they would be called up only in an emergency, when the situation got out of hand.

As we know, the situation got out of hand the moment that they joined, and they have been called up ever since. Certainly, that is true of the permanent cadre. The regiment has changed as it has developed and has become more and more a professional body. The percentage of permanent cadre has risen, and as time has gone by, the attitude of UDR members has probably altered towards the whole business of being part of the British Army. For that reason, they will be extremely grateful for the opportunities to expand their careers in the British Army that the Bill will make available to them.

On the question of general service battalions serving in Northern Ireland—my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) raised this point—the new regiment will have its regular service battalions, which will serve alongside the home service battalions. There is no reason why this should not go on as in the past.

I very much commend the Bill to the House, and I hope that members of the Democratic Unionist party will find it possible to support it too.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:-

The House divided: Ayes 127, Noes 5.

Division No. 81] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellotti, David
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
French, Douglas
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hardy, Peter
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Haynes, Frank
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lamond, James
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lewis, Terry
Lightbown, David
Livsey, Richard
Lord, Michael
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Morrison, Sir Charles
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Reid, Dr John
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shersby, Michael
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Snape, Peter
Speller, Tony

Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Kilfedder, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Rev. William McCrea and
Mr. Peter Robinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 17th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempt business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Question or Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the European Economic Area not later than three hours after their commencement; and that Motion may be proceeded with after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That the unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 29th November and 10th December 1991, relating to Agreements between the Community and Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and by the Department of Trade and Industry on 30th December 1991, relating to the establishment of a European Economic Area, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee B.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Dioxin (Bolsover)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

10.11 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I make no apology for returning to the issue of dioxin in the Bolsover area. What I am absolutely sure started off in the Minister's mind as being nothing more than a nine-day wonder has turned out to be an eight-month scandal.

It all began on 26 June, when the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in a written answer to a question planted by a Tory—not even in a reply to the hon. Member for Bolsover—informed the House that two farms in the Bolsover area, near the Coalite plant, would have to stop selling milk. It was a devastating blow for the farmers, as can be imagined, and it was also a worry for the people in the Bolsover area. Because the milk could not be sold, it had to be destroyed. It was sent to an incinerator plant in the west midlands. The Minister did not even know whether that plant could burn the dioxin. As a result, the contaminated milk was spread round the west midlands, and finally it was sent up to Ellesmere Port for incineration.

We immediately called for a public inquiry. I reckon that it is the kind of subject that warrants a public inquiry, but we did not even have a statement in this House. The only references to the matter are to be found in answers to questions that I and other hon. Members put to the Minister. When, in October, we heard that another farmer in the Bolsover area had been prevented from pursuing his livelihood we began to wonder whether the Minister cared at all. With the stopping of a third farmer's production, one would have expected the Government to hold an inquiry and pay compensation to the farmers concerned. They have had every opportunity. They have only to study what happens in Holland, where when such events occur the Government pay compensation and then sue the polluter. But all that the Government of this country can do is to keep saying that the polluter must pay. Just imagine three small farmers trying to take on a £40 million giant like Anglo United Coalite. These people have a problem, and they have had to turn to their Member of Parliament and to others to raise it for them.

It is interesting that when the safety levels were measured two farms out of 27—a third was discovered later—would have failed the tests. I made some inquiries because I wondered what happened to the other 25 farms—did the dioxin test apply to them? I found out that only just before the tests were carried out the Government had changed the testing ratio by a factor of 10. The result of my inquiries was the discovery that if the old figures had been used to judge the safety level every farm in that area of north Derbyshire would have been deemed to be producing contaminated milk and putting it into the milk chain. That change of measurement has not been disputed as it appeared in *New Scientist* on 20 July.

Not long afterwards, the National Rivers Authority got into action. As a result of my representations, it did some tests immediately above the effluent discharge of Bolsover Coalite and immediately below in the watercourse known as the river Doe Lea, a relatively small stream. The NRA had already established that the river Doe Lea was 1,000 times above the safety level. When measured, the level of

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

dioxin sediment above the effluent discharge turned out to be very much higher below that point after the effluent had been pushed into the river.

At that point we were beginning to establish that Coalite was a factor. Hitherto, Coalite had said, "If you mention our name outside, we will sue." About that time some of the workers at Coalite became worried about what might ensue, but they were not worried in the way that Coalite management expected. They turned up at meetings arranged by environmental groups because they and the trade union shop stewards knew that as they worked in the plant they had to be part of a programme to try to clean up the ghastly mess.

Further calls were made for an inquiry—Derbyshire county council, Bolsover district council and the local parish council all joined in and said that there should be a public inquiry. Some of the local authorities took the time to examine everything through the environmental health committees to ensure that they were on safe ground. Not long after that, a report by the BBC said that a cluster of breast cancers which had been reported in that part of north Derbyshire was calculated to be 50 per cent. higher than the national average. Still the Government refused to act. There was still no statement.

During this time the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, when he was not stuffing beefburgers down his kid's throat, went to see the farmers——

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I thought that he was a vegetarian.

Mr. Skinner: No, he is the opposite. He went to see the farmers and gave them the impression that they were not to worry because it would all be over by Christmas: "We know that Skinner is asking for compensation but we shall provide you with a bit of money from the common agricultural fund or from the Ministry and we will pay you to do a bit of research." However, the farmers did not want that—they wanted to get back to their husbandry of cows and to producing milk.

One might think that the farmers were taken in, but the truth is they were not. The matter was not sorted out by Christmas. By this time, the dioxin-contaminated milk had been around for six months. Every time we asked the Minister what was happening, he was very complacent and said that everything would be sorted out. It is still not sorted out. What the Minister thought was a minor blip on the horizon is still a massive scandal. One of my hon. Friends, who might catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, has also raised the problem of an area adjacent to the River Doe Lea, only a couple of miles away.

About November or December time I had another letter. It came from a constituent who was not engaged in milk production but who owned a little field next to Coalite. He told me that he had sent a letter to the Minister of Agriculture because he was worried about whether he should allow a lady to graze her horse in his field. He was thinking of using the field for cattle and sheep the following year and he wanted to know if it would be safe to do so. He told me that he kept writing to the Minister but that the Minister would not answer his letters.

This was the 64-dollar question, because here we had the Government covering up a scandal. They had neither the guts nor the decency to tell my constituent what to do about grazing a horse. So I took the matter up with the Minister himself.

Mr. Haynes: With this Minister?

Mr. Skinner: No, I wrote to his gaffer, although no one thinks of Gummer as being a gaffer; they used to call him the wart on Thatcher's nose. Finally, the Minister had to respond because the question came from an hon. Member, and the answer was that he did not think that the horse should be grazed there any more.

This was a qualitative change. First of all it was milk production. Then it was another farmer who was not engaged in milk production. Then it was another one with another field where the tests had not been done. But they were so scared that they had to tell him not to go ahead.

Hon. Members can imagine that by that time everyone in Bolsover was beginning to call for an inquiry. We have a petition here with thousands of signatures. Everyone has signed it, including all the political parties. Even the Liberal party told me that I was doing a great job—I was almost on the horns of a dilemma. They all know that it is wrong. This is one of the most dangerous toxic substances in the world, and the Government will not face up to the consequences.

The Bolsover district council has also written to the Minister, asking for a survey of atmospheric dioxins. It has received no answer.

I wonder what has happened to the citizens charter. The people of Bolsover keep asking about that. They ask why it is that the Prime Minister rabbits on every single week, going on television outside 10 Downing street, telling the nation about the citizens charter and how people can complain to the Government and get their problems solved, and yet they have had this problem for eight months and nothing has been done. We have to judge people not by what they say but by what they do, and it appears that the Prime Minister and his gang do not care about the people of Bolsover.

There is another problem that the Minister ought to turn his attention to—the history of the area. He ought to consider whether it is not just some airborne dioxins from a faulty incinerator which have been deposited. Could it be the fault of the 1968 fire, when 245T was produced and when the debris was flung hundreds of yards, that we now have dioxins embedded in those fields? Maybe when the two barrels of 245T went up in 1986 and the fire took place at Coalite, that too could have contributed to some static dioxins in the area, rather than just something happening because of a faulty incinerator.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It needs investigating.

Mr. Skinner: All these things need investigating, as my hon. Friend says.

Then I had a letter from the new Bolsover primary school.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East) *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: I am sorry, but we have not got much time.

The little kids asked me only this week to raise the matter with the Minister in order to get it resolved. Fortunately, an election is on the way. When it has taken place and we have a Labour Government, something will be done. The shadow spokesperson for agriculture made a statement when this whole saga began. He said that a Labour Government would set up a public inquiry. That is why, in a few months time, perhaps we shall have our public inquiry, and people will be able to express their views. Until then I ask the Minister why, even after eight months, he does not start a public inquiry.

If dioxin in milk, and all the rest of it, had been found anywhere near the Houses of Parliament or Buckingham palace, or in some Tory marginal seat, there would have been a public inquiry. If that would be good enough for those people, it should be good enough for the people of Bolsover as well.

10.25 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Pollution knows no boundaries. North-east Derbyshire, Chesterfield and Bolsover constituencies and districts are intimately interlinked. The river Doe Lea, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), runs into the river Rother, which was known as one of the most polluted rivers in the country. But clearly at the moment the river Doe Lea is the most polluted river in the country.

There are many industrial plants along the river Rother, which add to pollution problems in the area and create difficulties for people living nearby. Plants such as Leigh Environmental, at Killamarsh—about which I once introduced an Adjournment debate—Staveley Chemicals —which is now known as Rhone Chemicals—and the Avenue coke works produce problems with airborne pollution and effluent. Forty million gallons of effluent a year are lost in deposits at Grassmoor lagoons, because the National Rivers Authority, rightly, will not let the effluent go straight into the river Rother without being treated—that would create extra problems. That causes difficulties for my constituents who live in the Grassmoor, Tupton, and Wingerworth areas.

A problem common to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover and myself is that when we pursue such matters we have to deal with a host of different authorities. There are the National Rivers Authority, different Government Departments—such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Department of the Environment and the Department of Energy—and a range of planning authorities at district and county level.

Something must be done to draw the threads together and co-ordinate the investigations, such as the public inquiry that my hon. Friend suggested in the dioxin case, or an environmental audit, operating through the Department of the Environment, to draw together the problems caused by the Avenue coke works. If those things do not happen, we find great difficulty in tackling the problems on behalf of our constituents.

The Avenue coke works produces smokeless fuel, which is environmentally desirable, so the process should continue. The jobs associated with it should also continue, but there is no reason why the health hazards and pollution should continue.

It is possible to square that circle, if there is a proper investigation and the correct assistance is provided at Government level.

10.27 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has laid a number of charges at the Government's door with which I will deal.

Dioxins have long been the focus of considerable public interest. They are ubiquitous and long-lasting environmental contaminants. They are unwanted by-products of some chemical processes, produced in minute quantities by combustion processes such as waste incineration, coal burning and forest fires. As a result, they can be found in trace quantities in the environment in all the industrialised countries.

Although such substances have throughout history been part of the environment, it is only in the last couple of years that the complex analytical techniques have been developed that have made it possible for us to measure down to the minuscule levels that enable us to set a figure on their level with any accuracy. I want to make it clear that we are talking, after all, of a few parts per thousand million million.

I will deal in some detail with the one very localised problem that our thorough and extensive safety surveillance has revealed. Last summer, our monitoring work disclosed the presence of higher levels of dioxins than usual in milk from two farms near Bolsover. We had also monitored milk at retail level as it reached the public and were well aware that levels there were quite normal, presenting no health risk to consumers.

The higher farm results, however, clearly necessitated action, and we immediately notified the milk marketing board, which found that the level of contamination in this milk was such that it did not meet its contract conditions. The board therefore took no further supplies from those farms, which were then unable to dispose of their milk for human consumption. There was therefore no possibility whatever of the contaminated milk getting into the public supply once the result of the monitoring was known.

It was, of course, necessary to put in place secure arrangements for the safe disposal of the milk that could no longer be sold. The hon. Member for Bolsover inquired about those arrangements by letter last August, and he has already received an explanation, so on this occasion I will do no more than mention briefly the salient points. The temporary arrangement set up in the early days was to have the milk transported to a water authority sewage plant, where it was mixed with a considerable quantity of sewage to dilute the dioxin content to a negligible level. The resulting sludge was then incinerated. The temporary arrangement came to an end on 2 August and was replaced by disposal of the milk to an incinerator equipped to carry out destruction of the material without the need for dilution.

The Department acted immediately to set up a further programme of testing both on the two farms and on a number of others in the locality where the levels were found, although not requiring action, to be higher than normal. The further testing programme brought to light a third farm in which the level of dioxins in milk necessitated further action. In this case, however, the farmer had not been selling milk for public consumption for some years. He was simply operating a suckler cow herd.

It is important to understand the comprehensive action that the Department undertook as a result of the situation,

[Mr. David Maclean]

which our food safety surveillance has now revealed. A very detailed research programme has been devised, which is now approaching its conclusion. All three farmers have agreed not to move animals off their farms while further testing is carried out. The programme has included the examination of dioxin concentrations in meat, covering animals of different age, sex and breed from a range of farms in the area as a whole and seeking to establish variations in dioxin concentration in edible tissues.

In milk, the programme has studied how changes have occurred in the dioxin concentration in milk from animals fed dioxin-free feed. The study has examined also how the level varies with time. Further information has also been obtained to establish the seasonal variation in the concentration of dioxins in milk taking account, for example, of changes in farming practice and the type of feed available.

Beyond those animal studies, dioxin concentrations in soil and herbage have been obtained from a range of different sites on the farms. All that work will help to enable detailed advice to be given on future farming and business operations, and the soil and herbage data in particular will allow valuable comparisons to be made with findings in other parts in the country.

Mr. Skinner: The Minister seems to be clear about the prognosis. Why did the Ministry promise the farmers that the matter would be cleared up by Christmas? One of the farmers, Mr. Murphy, wrote to me on 4 February, and I have sent his letter to the Ministry. He said, "Mr. Skinner, they promised that the matter would be cleared up by Christmas. The Ministry then told us it would be January. The Ministry then told us it would be February. It has still not been completed." I have an answer from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. On 11 February, he said that the Ministry is now not sure that it will even get the tests completed by mid-March, and that it might take longer than that. It is almost a year since the process began.

Mr. Maclean: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will publish the full data, the full research and all the conclusions. We will publish the report as soon as we can but it is a technical and complex area. We are searching for parts per quadrillion—parts per thousand million million—and it is not easy to do that and get it right. We are also conscious of sensitivities. Farmers' futures are at stake, and they and their representatives will have to decide what action to take in the future. It behoves my Department to get this absolutely right and ensure that, when we publish the report, the figures are absolutely correct so that everyone can rely on them.

The research programme has necessarily involved considerable disruption to the farmers concerned. Their normal farming activities have had to be dramatically changed, and considerable constraints have been necessary to their activities generally. In recognition of the considerable disturbance, inseparable from their co-operation in the research—co-operation that, I recognise, has been readily given—contracts have been drawn up with all of them under which payments have been made to them promptly and regularly for their part in the research work.

The hon. Member for Bolsover has been somewhat unfair to my right hon. Friend the Minister because, throughout this whole unfortunate incident, my right hon. Friend and I have been acutely conscious of the position of the three farmers principally concerned. The disruption of their lives and the uncertainty that still hangs over the future of their farms results from factors entirely outside their control. As the hon. Member will be aware, my right hon. Friend visited the two farmers who were first involved as soon as possible after the news had been broken to him. He was able to hear from them direct about the extent of the problems facing them, explore matters fully with them, and form his own view as to what needed to be done.

I have underlined the fact that we lost no time in setting up our comprehensive research programme, devoting considerable resources to analysing the dioxin problem on the farms and providing guidance and help on the problems that those families are facing during what is inevitably a period of great uncertainty.

The programme is drawing to an end, and we hope that the detailed results will be available by mid-March. That will enable us to assess all aspects of the situation, so that full and detailed advice can be offered to the three families on their business and husbandry options for the future.

Mr. William Ross: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maclean: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I shall not give way, as this is an important matter for Bolsover and Derbyshire, and I should like to get my remarks on the record. I do not want to be accused of a cover-up.

I well understand that the farmers, their advisers and their representatives are anxious to have all the information as quickly as possible. I give the hon. Member for Bolsover a categorical assurance that I share his concern. I am determined that there will be no avoidable delay in completing the work and presenting the results in full, but all of us—whether farmers desperate to know what the future holds, parliamentary representatives, like the hon. Gentleman, determined to ensure that the best interests of their constituents are served, or Ministers anxious to ensure that the fullest information is available to back the decisions that are taken—must remember that we are working at the very limits of the science.

Our scientists are conducting highly complex tests, analysing for minute traces of substances that will be present only in a few parts per thousand million million. That work is complicated and necessarily extremely time-consuming. It cannot be simplified, we will not cut corners and we cannot accelerate.

We shall complete the job, we shall do it properly, and we shall do it well. That is our firm undertaking. I reiterate and re-emphasise our unequivocal further undertaking that, as always, all the results of our programme will be published. Indeed, if the hon. Gentleman has read the copy of the report "Dioxins in Food" which was sent to him by my Department, he will have seen the detailed tables of statistics relating to the range of foodstuffs that we have monitored over the years. I assure him that he and everyone else concerned will have the same opportunity to study the figures resulting from our detailed investigations in the Bolsover area.

The hon. Gentleman has argued for a public inquiry. I have described the action taken in this case at some length to demonstrate that there really is no case for that. First, there is no evidence that there has ever been a risk to health from what has occurred here. The milk reaching consumers has been tested and tested and found to present no risk. The cows on the affected farms have since been dried off and no further milk is being produced for human consumption. The contaminated milk has been safely destroyed.

Secondly, a comprehensive programme of further investigations has been undertaken on food products, on herbage and soil, and on emissions from the nearby chemical plant. Thirdly, categorical assurances have been given in the House several times—and I have repeated them tonight—that all the results of the testing programme will be published so that every scrap of relevant evidence will be available to be evaluated by all the parties to the affair to aid them in deciding on any future action that they may wish to contemplate.

Despite the criticisms laid at our door by the hon. Gentleman, I believe that the record clearly shows that the rapid and wide-ranging action taken by the Government over the Bolsover incident will stand up to any scrutiny. It was the very quality of our food surveillance programme —the equal of any in the world—that brought the problem to light in the first place. It was the highly specialised expertise and the experience we have built up in this very complex area of analysis that has enabled us to assess the problem.

Our action has immediately removed any possibility of public concern that might have existed—and we have devoted a very considerable effort to further research that will guide us forward in future. We are, moreover, giving all the support that we can to the farmers involved, both through the research contracts that we have agreed with them, and the guidance and help we have offered to them in their difficult circumstances.

We shall be able to offer more precise and detailed guidance when the research programme is complete—and let me repeat that we are very close to being in that position now. We hope to publish the results by mid-March. We have made a very clear commitment to publish all the results of our work to reassure the public about the situation and to place the farmers concerned in the best position to decide on their future course of action.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at nineteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 14 February 1992

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Mr. Robin Corbett, supported by Mr. Neil Kinnock, Mr. Roy Hattersley, Mr. Barry Sheerman, Mr. Alistair Darling, Mr. Stuart Randall, Miss Joan Lestor, Mr. Eric Illsley and Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, presented a Bill to establish a general right of access to official records for members of the public subject to certain exemptions; to provide for the correction of inaccurate records; to provide for individuals to be notified of the availability of benefits in certain circumstances; to provide for the enforcement of these provisions; to repeal the Official Secrets Act 1989 and replace it by new provisions; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 February, and to be printed. [Bill 79.]

Orders of the Day

Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the promoter of the Bill, I must announce that, in view of the many right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to put a 10-minute limit on speeches between 11.30 and 1 pm. I hope that those who are called before and after that time will bear that limit in mind in fairness to their colleagues.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for delaying the start of the Bill, but I wish to draw your attention to a printed lobbying card supplied and printed by the League Against Cruel Sports sent to me and many other hon. Members by constituents—a copy of which I have here. I received one such card which purported to come from my constituent, Mr. D. A. Marriot of 25 Hart street, Cleethorpes. The card asked me to be present today to support the Bill. I replied by letter to Mr. Marriot, advising him that although I would be present, I would be voting against the Bill.

Mr. Marriot has written to me to say:

> "I am somewhat puzzled as to the circular you refer to. I have no knowledge of the said Bill and no recollection of placing my name on any circular, petition or form of any kind . . . I believe my name has been used without my consent, something I object to very strongly. I request a full explanation."

I also want an explanation. It is clear that the card purporting to come from my constituent is a forgery of his name.

It may be that other cards that I have received must also be forgeries. I think that hon. Members who have been persuaded by the number of cards they have received to support the Bill have also received forgeries. Is not it an outrageous and disgraceful abuse that the relationship between hon. Members and their constituents should be subject to such forgery and intimidation by the League Against Cruel Sports? Can something be done to get rid of such outrageous forgeries?

Mr. Speaker: I think that all hon. Members, and even Mr. Speaker, receive many circulars, but we put less emphasis on them than on personal letters written by our constituents.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. With respect, it is worth while drawing attention to the abuses that have gone on in the name of the League Against Cruel Sports. In addition to the incident mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), I have received an envelope containing 15 of those cards, all in the same handwriting, which purport to come from a number of different addresses in my constituency. Is there not some way that you, Mr. Speaker, can draw to the attention of the league, which claims, with every justification, to be a reputable organisation, what some of its organisers appear to have done?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me, but it can be raised during the debate. I am sure that the hon. Member's remarks will be noted by the league.

9.37 am

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

On the matter just raised by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown, I make one observation. If anybody is forging other people's names in the name of the League Against Cruel Sports, of which I am proud to be a vice-president, I urge the hon. Gentleman to take the matter directly to the police. That is a proper way in which to deal with the forgeries. The hon. Gentleman has the same police force as my own—the excellent Humberside police force—and I am sure that it will pursue any complaint about our constituents' names being wrongly used.

At the outset, I thank my colleagues of all parties who have sponsored the Bill and have agreed, at considerable inconvenience, to make themselves available to vote on this important issue even though we are approaching a general election. I also apologise to the secretaries of hon. Members who do and who do not support the Bill for the amount of work that they have done in the past few weeks. One way to avoid more work in the future would be for the secretaries to persuade their Members to vote for the Bill.

I thank the League Against Cruel Sports and the RSPCA for their continued support on this issue and for the help that they have given me and many of my hon. Friends in preparing for this important debate. I also thank the British public as a whole for their wholehearted support for the principles contained in the Bill.

I wish at the outset to explain what the Bill does not do. There is behind the measure no domino theory. Angling is not included. I have no intention whatever of interfering with anglers. J. R. Hartley can to to a second edition and Izaak Walton can rest safely in his grave; there is no need for him to toss or turn.

The Bill does not concern shooting, but in case people feel that it might, I propose in Committee to move a new clause which will read:

> "A person shall not be guilty of an offence under section 1 if he shows that he was using an authorised firearm with the authority of the owner or occupier of the land, unless it is shown that he caused unnecessary suffering by using an inappropriate weapon which he knew was likely to cause such suffering."

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West) *rose*——

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman will understand if I do not give way at this stage, because I am explaining what is not in the Bill. I shall be happy to give way later, when explaining what is in it.

The Bill contains provisions for licensing by authorities of necessary measures for pest control. I shall be happy once the Bill is in Committee to enter negotiations with the national conservancy bodies, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and authorities in Scotland on an approved method for dealing with particular animals and dealing with the general problem of pest control.

Mr. Budgen: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why he is prepared to use legislation to outlaw hunting for sport while at the time saying that he is in favour of the continuance of shooting for sport?

Mr. McNamara: I shall deal with that as I go through the various provisions of the measure—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]—and I assure the hon. Gentleman that his question will be answered. *[Interruption.]* I trust that hon. Members who are fortunate to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, will make their own speeches in their own way. I shall make mine in my own way.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I believe that the hon. Gentleman has been closely associated with a Mr. John Bryant of the League Against Cruel Sports. I know that to be so, because a letter sent to the hon. Gentleman by a member of the public was passed to Mr. Bryant for reply. That seems a somewhat questionable practice.

Apart from that, may I ask the hon. Gentleman whether he thinks that it is sensible that he and his Bill should be associated with someone who, writing in a book entitled "Fettered Kingdom", published in 1982, made it clear that he opposed not only hunting but shooting, fishing, eating meat, riding horses and even people keeping pets? Is it not clear—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd: Order. We are beginning the debate in the way that I intend it to continue. Interventions will be relevant, and they will be interventions and not speeches.

Mr. Riddick: Is it not clear from what I have said that that gentleman is a fanatic and that the Bill is simply the thin end of the wedge?

Mr. McNamara: If we are talking about fanatics, I refer hon. Members to the front page of *The Times* this morning, which shows a picture of a child of three holding a placard proclaiming, "Hunting is my future". If a child of three is to spend his time pulling foxes to pieces, using a hare as a rope for a tug of war between greyhounds and chasing pregnant hinds over cliffs, then, if people want to be associated with that, that is for them.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. McNamara: I have yet to come to the detail of the Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I will give way to one more hon. Member, and that will be it. I regret that that must be the case, but I would rather be questioned about the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): The hon. Gentleman made an accusation about fanatics chasing pregnant hinds over cliffs. I assume that he is referring to a case that received widespread press coverage a few weeks ago. Is he aware that that hind was not driven over a cliff by hounds, as was suggested by the press? It was a steep slope and when the hunt had left, the hind was perfectly safe and able to find her own way out. The only time she fell was when she was frightened by the lights of the television cameras and the RSPCA.

Mr. McNamara: It must have been the first case in recorded history of a hind deliberately committing suicide.

My Bill has a very simple purpose. It seeks to correct the anomaly in the law that permits people wilfully to inflict on a wild mammal an act of cruelty which would be criminal if it were inflicted on a domestic animal. That is the broad principle of the Bill.

The RSPCA has circulated details of gross cruelty inflicted on wild mammals such as foxes, deer and hedgehogs. They have involved sadistic and deliberately inflicted torture, but, regrettably, in the eyes of the law at present, they have been a perfectly legal—or innocent, in a legal sense—activity.

For example, a gang of youths in Canterbury repeatedly shot a hedgehog with an air rifle, then played football with it and finally threw the animal, still alive, on to a bonfire. They admitted that the animal was still alive and screaming after their game had ended. The RSPCA attempted to prosecute, but the case failed, because the hedgehog could not be defined as a domestic or captive animal.

Another case involved friends of hon. Members who oppose the Bill. Four terrier men attached a rope to a fox which they forced into a waterpipe. They then entered a terrier which attacked the fox for five minutes. When approached by a witness, they pulled out the fox, which was screeching in pain. It ran off, dragging its injured leg behind it.

Similar abuses involving foxes, hedgehogs and squirrels have been dealt with by the RSPCA, but their efforts to prosecute have been frustrated because of the situation under the law. Parliament has failed to take the logical step of making cruelty to wild mammals a criminal offence.

The idea of providing such protection is nothing new. In 1948, the Attlee Government set up a committee to inquire into cruelty to wild animals. The committee, otherwise known as the Scott Henderson Committee, reported in 1951. The first of its 63 recommendations said:

> "All wild animals should be brought within the provisions of the protection of animals Acts. This will make it possible for action to be taken against any person who causes or permits unnecessary suffering to a wild animal."

Unfortunately, the majority of the committee was pro-hunting, including a master of foxhounds, a vet to two packs of hounds and others known to be field sports enthusiasts. There was not one animal welfare representative on that committee of inquiry. No doubt for that reason, the committee, having called for all wild animals to be protected from cruelty, went on to recommend that all field sports should be exempted from prosecution.

That is old history and out of date. Parliament has already made some progress in the matter. Otter hunting and badger digging, both of which were protected by the Scott Henderson report, are now illegal. I do not believe that any reasonable person could vote against clause 1 of my Bill. Who but a sadist could argue in favour of people having the right wilfully to inflict unnecessary suffering on an animal? Clause 1 therefore says:

> "If, save as permitted by this Act, a person wilfully inflicts unnecessary suffering on, or cruelly ill-treats a wild mammal, he shall be guilty of an offence."

Opponents of the Bill have created much mischief by talking about its effects on shooting. I have already shown how I intend to deal with that. Nevertheless, most shooting for sport involves the shooting of birds or clay pigeons, neither of which can be described as mammals, so they are not covered by the Bill. No reasonable shooter raises his gun to shoot a rabbit, a deer or any other mammal with the intention of inflicting unnecessary suffering upon that animal.

To obtain a conviction under clause 1, a court would have to accept, first, that there was proof of suffering, which would normally but not necessarily require veterinary evidence; secondly, that there was evidence that the suffering was unnecessary; and, finally, that the unnecessary suffering was wilfully inflicted. For a prosecution to succeed under clause 1, therefore, the case would need to be similar to the gruesome cases that I described earlier.

I am prepared to make the necessary arrangements in Committee to deal with shooting. The Bill provides for licensing arrrangements to permit, if considered necessary, methods of taking or killing wild mammals that, without a licence, may lead to a prosecution.

Clause 2 is causing the greatest controversy. It prohibits the use of dogs to take, kill, injure, pursue or attack wild mammals. I remind the House that the wilful use of dogs to attack other domestic animals is already an offence under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and that my Bill seeks to elevate wild animals to the same status as domestic animals in respect of protection from cruelty.

According to a Gallup poll taken last November, 80 per cent. of the public oppose fox hunting. At recent press conferences arranged by the Campaign for Hunting it was suggested that the figure had been obtained by the use of a loaded question. The quesion was very loaded—it said:

> "Do you approve or disapprove of foxhunting?"

Far more important, the poll showed that that public disapproval is not merely some irrelevant, hypothetical objection to hunting. Gallup also asked:

> "Would you approve or disapprove if Parliament passed a law to ban foxhunting?"

The result was that 79 per cent. would approve of such a ban. The poll showed that that view is held by the vast majority of the country, regardless of their political allegiance, geographical location, sex, age or demography.

The opposition to the hunting of wild animals to death is also reflected in the votes to ban hunting by 130 local authorities, including 28 councils. The council of the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) and my county council of Humberside, and the New Forest district council are among those. Those are councils of all political persuasions.

It is said that the hunting of foxes by hounds is necessary to control the fox population. However, according to a study carried out by Bristol university, fox hunting with hounds kills 12,000 to 13,000 foxes a year —a figure which was recently confirmed by the Government. The author of the Bristol university report, Dr. Stephen Harris, calculates that that represents about 2·5 per cent. of the fox population. He states:

> "It is clear that hunts play no significant role in the control of fox populations."

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I refer my hon. Friend to a letter that I received from a gentleman in Lincolnshire who say that the Blankney hunt

> "'imports' its foxes from a centre which breeds foxes for hunting".

That runs contrary to the vermin argument. It makes no sense to import foxes—[Hon. Members: "It is illegal."] If it is illegal, clearly that needs to be dealt with.

Mr. McNamara: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. Some hunts deliberately create a situation in which foxes can breed so that they have foxes to hunt. It cannot be argued that fox hunting controls pests when hunts are producing those pests.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Is the hon. Gentleman aware—I do not think that he is—that, because one of the effects of clause 2 would be to ban hunting, within a month of the clause becoming law, up to 1 million horses will be put down? [Hon. Members: "Oh, come on."] Up to 1 million horses will be slaughtered because there will be no further practical use for them.

Mr. McNamara: That is interesting. That is the sort of figure that comes out of the Michael Howard school of accounting. There are only 800,000 horses in this country anyway, and fewer than 10 per cent. of those are used in hunting. In any event, there is no reason why people should not drive horses.

That is the last intervention that I intend to allow, because I have timed my speech to take 25 minutes, and it is now 5 minutes to 10.

It is well established that the density of fox populations is governed by the availability of food in a defended territory, as with all animals at the top of their food chain that do not suffer from natural predation. The fact that an animal does not have any natural predators does not mean that man has to cull its numbers. Badgers have no natural predators, yet the House has spent many long days providing for their total protection—not only from cruelty but from interference.

Overseas studies in rabies control programmes demonstrate that, to reduce a fox population, a cull of about 70 per cent. would be necessary to overcome the effects of the rapid migration of other foxes into the vacant territories and increased reproduction among the survivors.

Fox hunting with hounds is not fox control and was never designed to be. It was designed as a human entertainment and that is what it remains—a sport which not only kills foxes, but results in pet cats and dogs being killed by hounds, livestock being stampeded and killed, crops being damaged, fences and hedges damaged, and road and rail users being endangered.

Fox hunting is a contrived sport. To ensure a long gallop for the riders and followers, the hunt employs people to go out into the countryside the night before a hunt to block up fox earths, drains and badger setts, to deny the fox a refuge from the hounds. Many hon. Members will recall our debates last year to overcome the problems caused to badgers due to fox hunters blocking setts with sacks of rubble, oil drums and other immovable objects.

On the day of the hunt, when the hounds find a fox, it runs from blocked hole to blocked hole in an attempt to utilise its natural defence mechanism of hiding underground from danger. The hounds, of course, are bred for stamina rather than speed. The fox is a sprinter and is eventually beaten by the hounds' superior stamina. Finally, the fox is caught and bitten to death by the hounds. If the fox does find an underground refuge which the hunt's earth-stoppers have missed, terriers are usually sent in to either bolt the fox to suffer further hunting or engage it in battle until it can be dug out and killed, or released for further torment. We saw recently how the Quorn behaves.

The underground battles between fox and terrier can go on for hours, with both combatants suffering terrible injuries. Sometimes the dogs are lost for days or even permanently. That brings me to another form of fox hunting which my Bill will abolish.

While terrier work is a part of every hunt, separate gangs of men also go out for the gruesome sport of digging out foxes with the aid of terriers. Not for those people the pageantry of hunting with hounds. They have no interest in horses, the so-called thrill of the chase and watching hounds at work. Their fun comes from witnessing the life-and-death struggle of fox and terrier. A fox can often put up a stout defence against a single terrier, but eventually it is overcome by sheer weight of numbers or a blow from a spade. Many of those terrier men move on to badger digging.

Every person ever convicted of badger-digging has been a self-confessed foxhunting terrier man. Therefore, the ending of terrier work will not only protect foxes from cruelty but serve to prevent the suffering of badgers and terriers.

The fox remains the main sufferer at the hands of those who enjoy setting dogs on to wild animals, not for pest control but for the chase or the kill. There is no real evidence to suggest that foxes in general are a problem for farmers. In fact, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food describes fox predation as insignificant.

Some farmers may dispute that, but I suggest that, even if there were evidence that the fox was a significant pest, the use of dogs would still be intolerable and inefficient because of the terror, suffering and pain that it inflicts. My Bill does not prohibit the killing of foxes; it seeks to outlaw the infliction of unnecessary suffering. Cage traps and shooting are available. If for some reason it is not possible to deal with a problem using such methods, anyone with a genuine need to kill foxes, hares or any other mammal will have the facility to seek a licence to use methods which otherwise might be unlawful.

The disgusting sport of hare coursing, which even its proponents do not claim is a method of pest control, will be banned under my Bill, as will the hunting of deer with dogs. The use of dogs against deer is already unlawful in Scotland—the main stronghold of red deer—where shooting with a rifle is the general rule. The killing of deer in England and Wales for necessary culling is carried out mostly with the rifle. My Bill will stop only the barbarism of those few people who insist on chasing a deer with hounds for hours, until the terrified animal is too exhausted to continue to provide a chase for the riders. At the end of the chase, the deer should be shot, but eye witnesses and overwhelming photographic evidence—including videos—show that sometimes the hounds savage the deer before a gunman can catch up.

The removal of that savagery is long overdue. The incident last month when the Quantock stag hounds chased a pregnant hind to its death over a quarry cliff has severed only to illustrate that such cruelty can no longer be permitted in a civilised society.

My Bill provides sensible exemptions. A farmer whose dog chases rabbits or rodents will be exempt from prosecution. The weight ratio of a dog to a rabbit or rodent usually ensures that in the event of the dog's catching such animals, they are quickly dispatched, whereas larger mammals are likely to suffer significantly. Indeed, the use of ferrets and other similar creatures for rabbiting will also be permitted. Bill Owen may rest content.

Using dogs to track animals which are wounded or suffering from disease will also be permitted and I shall favour a later amendment that will permit dogs on leashes to track wild animals that are known to have caused damage to livestock or may have escaped from a zoo or circus. Using dogs in such a way will enable full advantage to be taken of the dog's scenting abilities, without allowing it full rein to attack and injure or kill.

Clause 3 outlaws the use of snares—except, of course, under special licence. Those wicked devices are designed to throttle an animal and hold it until the trapper—within 24 hours, it is to be hoped—returns to kill the animal. It is an offence of cruelty to set a snare for a domestic animal. If it is cruel to snare a cat or dog, it must be cruel to snare a fox. In 1981, we abolished the self-locking snare because it is a vicious instrument which inflicts injuries and death.

It was the hunting lobby which thwarted our attempts to outlaw all snares, including the free-running snare. To be caught by any form of snare must be a terrifying experience for any free-living wild animal. To be held by the neck or body for up to twenty four hours—or longer, if the trapper cannot be bothered to check—must inflict great pain as the animal writhes and struggles to free itself. What is more, snares are unselective. The RSPCA reports that many domestic animals and livestock, as well as protected animals such as badgers, are caught in snares set for foxes and rabbits. That, then, is the purpose of my Bill —to outlaw forms of cruelty which, if inflicted on domestic animals, would be a criminal offence for which the perpetrators could be fined or even eventually sent to prison.

One could argue that only clause 1 is necessary to establish the principle of legal protection for wild mammals. However, the Protection of Animals Act 1911 recognises that, as well as general protection, Parliament has the right to specify individual acts that it considers to be unacceptable cruelty. For instance, under the 1911 Act, which applied only to domestic animals, beating, kicking, overriding, baiting and poisoning are all specific offences, as well as the general provision prohibiting the infliction of unnecessary suffering.

One of the arguments put up by the hunting fraternity is that if hunting is banned, all hounds and horses will have to be destroyed and people will be thrown out of work. The Campaign for Hunting claims that 16,000 jobs will be lost—although recent newspaper reports of rallies have increased that estimate to 30,000. It is interesting that in 1983 the pro-hunting umbrella group the Standing Conference on Countryside Sports, published a report produced by independent resource consultants. The report stated that only 750 people were employed in hunting and that even when ancilliary trades were taken into account, only the equivalent of 2,300 full-time jobs depended on hunting. During the past decade—we are in a period of recession, with 2·5 million people unemployed—employment associated with hunts has been the only area of employment expansion. Perhaps I should be grateful for that.

Richard Matson, a former master of hounds and chairman of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, wrote an article in "Horse and Hound" on 19 December, in which he stated that less than 7 per cent. of the nation's 600,000 horses are used in hunting. He said that most of those would find other occupations if hunting was banned.

However, there is nothing in the Bill that makes even one hound, one horse or one huntsman redundant. There is nothing to prevent those who hunt with hounds from switching to drag hunting, as already practised by about a dozen packs in Britain and by many more overseas. Drag hunting involves the laying of an artificial trail for the hounds and riders to follow. The hunt can be made as fast or as slow as the riders wish and it avoids many of the appalling incidents where hounds have followed their desperate quarry over roads and railway lines and through growing crops, terrifying livestock, raiding gardens and killing pets.

If the hunters wish to preserve their traditions, their hounds and their horses, drag hunting is available. We are told by the Campaign for Hunting that farmers would not tolerate hunts if they were not killing foxes. In fact, some of the existing drag hunts are run by farmers—including the Mid-Surrey Farmers Drag Hounds, and the Farmers Bloodhounds, which operate in the midlands. Of course, foxes are not a threat to dairy and arable farmers, who constitute the vast majority.

Even if one believes the unsubstantiated argument that foxes are a continual serious threat to lambs, the last thing that a sheep farmer wants is a pack of hounds tearing around among his ewes and lambs at lambing time. That, no doubt is why the magazine *Big Farm Weekly*—"Big" as in large, not "Pig" as in porker—reported last year in its survey of farmers' hobbies and recreations, that hunting was 33rd in popularity, well behind that well-known country sport of snooker.

Some hunters have declared that if the hunting of animals is banned they will not switch to drag hunting, which they say does not provide the same thrill as chasing an unpredictable wild animal and being present at the kill. That is up to them. If they would rather put their hounds to death and put the staff out of work than accept an alternative which would allow them to retain all the aspects of hunting except the kill, any job losses will be self-inflicted.

In common with the vast majority of people today, I believe that human entertainment is not a sufficient justification for hounding an animal to exhaustion and death. Public opinion and pure logic demand that there is no longer any reason why the House should delay implementing the first recommendation of the Scott Henderson committee of 40 years ago and introduce legislation to outlaw the wilful infliction of unnecessary suffering on our persecuted mammals. Animals are there for the use of man, not the abuse of man.

10.8 am

Mr. Nicholas Ridley (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I first spoke in the House almost exactly 32 years ago. A Bill on wildlife may provide an adequate opportunity for my swan song. I do not hunt. I never liked riding horses. When I was first asked to mount a pony I was told that after I had fallen off four times I would be a skilled horseman and that I had to persevere until then. I managed to fall off four times in the first hour and I have not been back on a horse since.

Although I do not hunt, I defend the right of others to do as they wish for their sports and pastimes, subject to its being not without the public interest. We must look at the Bill in the light of what is in the public interest. Clearly, it is not the protection of human beings. We allow people to hunt, although it is a dangerous sport. We allow people to engage in motor cycle racing, hang gliding and many other dangerous sports. Therefore, the Bill does not seek to protect the human race; nor does it seek to look after the interests of neighbours, because it is in the public interest that what people do should not be offensive to others or to their neighbours and should not damage their interests.

There is no way in which a hunt can cross land unless it is allowed to, and no one who does not want to hunt has to do so. In no sense is hunting damaging to the interests of those who do not do it. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) was quite clear that his case was based on cruelty to animals.

[Mr. Nicholas Ridley]

I spent my entire childhood in the countryside and I remember once coming round a corner and hearing the most appalling screaming. It chilled me to listen to that suffering of a rabbit. When I got up to it, a stoat was dancing round it in circles. It was enjoying the agony of the rabbit and several minutes passed before it jumped on the rabbit's back and bit its neck to kill it. On another occasion, I watched a curlew's nest with the intention of ringing the chicks when they hatched. I knew which morning they were likely to hatch and I went there. As I approached the nest, I heard the most appalling, pitiful screaming of the curlew parents. There were no chicks or eggs in the nest, but a big fox jumped down and ran away. In terms of cruelty to animals, those are two of the many examples of what happens in the wild in nature's own way.

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): I am listening carefully to my right hon. Friend. I cannot understand how he equates natural life and existence in the countryside, where animals are under pressure and where there is cruelty, with human cruelty against defenceless animals.

Mr. Ridley: That is exactly the point to which I am coming. I have first established that we are seeking to abolish not the cruelty of animals but cruelty by mankind. *[Interruption.]*

Let us look at what man does to animals. I do not know why we tolerate the poisoning of rats, which are among the most intelligent of mammals and suffer most if poisoned or gassed. Clauses 5, 6 and 8 allow, with a licence or under exceptions, the very practices that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North says are cruel. If they are cruel in absolute terms, there should be no exemptions or exceptions or licences to permit practices that the Bill seeks to outlaw. It is not right for the Bill gaily to make exceptions for other forms of sporting activity which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North has gone to some lengths to assure us do not apply in the Bill. I accept that.

At the last election the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) proposed on behalf of the Labour party a ban on fox hunting if Labour won the election. It was discovered that that would not be popular in the Lake district where one or two Labour seats were at risk, and the hon. Gentleman made an exception for hunting in national parks. In the hon. Gentleman's terms, one could be cruel in a national park but not outside it. As my constituency is only an area of outstanding natural beauty and not a national park, I felt that we were severely disadvantaged by that selective approach.

The Bill is about man enjoying killing animals, hunting with dogs, coursing and ferreting—what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North called "human entertainment". It is not cruelty of animals or cruelty by man to animals but human entertainment that the hon. Gentleman seeks to ban.

The Bill recognises the need to control foxes. The hon. Gentleman repeated that when he said that it was perfectly all right to shoot a fox with the appropriate weapon. There is no question but that he would like to see the number of predators, the foxes, kept at a reasonable level, and there are only four methods by which that can be achieved. Foxes can be shot, hunted to death, trapped or poisoned or gassed. In my subjective judgment, the least cruel of those methods is to hunt foxes and the most cruel is to shoot and wound but not kill them.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): My right hon. Friend speaks about the shooting of foxes. Does he agree that, sadly, many shooters are very poor shots and may badly injure a fox so that it creeps away to the bushes and dies an agonising death that is far worse than anything envisaged in hunting?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend can speak for himself about his prowess as a shot. I plead guilty to not being at all certain that I could guarantee to kill a fox. As I say, shooting is probably the most cruel way of seeking to control the fox population.

Mr. Stern: I am inclined to support many of the Bill's aims, but I find the matter about which my right hon. Friend speaks most difficult. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) was very unclear on the point. The logical way to dispose of foxes, if hunting is not permitted, is by shooting. The last thing that my urban constituents want is an increase in the number of gun licences issued to ordinary members of the public, and that would be an inevitable result of the Bill.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: I give way to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the right hon. Gentleman to respond to one intervention before allowing another.

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern). It is undesirable to pay such a price for killing in another way the foxes that are now killed by hunting. If I have a complaint against hunting, it is that it does not kill enough foxes.

Mr. Tony Banks: May I correct the right hon. Gentleman? It is not legal to gas or poison foxes. He said that the Bill was about ending entertainment, and I suppose that it is for those who think that hunting foxes and deer and ripping hares to pieces is entertainment. It seems a peculiar form of entertainment, but, of course, it was entertainment to engage in bear baiting, cock fighting and dog fighting. They were banned. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would suggest that they were entertainments which should not have been banned.

Mr. Ridley: I merely canvassed the four possible ways in which to destroy foxes. As the hon. Gentleman is right in saying that gassing and poisoning are out, we are left with shooting, hunting and trapping.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ridley: I will not give way because I want to be quick.

It is probably right to say that of the three remaining methods, hunting is the least cruel. I do not know how the Bill squares with that. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West said that the Bill concerned "entertainment".

Mr. Tony Banks: The right hon. Gentleman said that.

Mr. Ridley: I quoted the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, who said that hunting was "human entertainment". If the motive of those who want to stop hunting is to do nothing other than to prevent a form of human entertainment, what sort of slippery slope is that? I know many forms of human entertainment of which I personally do not approve and in which I should not like to take part. [HON. MEMBERS: "Tell us."] I will tell the House. I do not like boxing or football crowds. I can think of many entertainments that are not attractive to other people, but I defend to the utmost the right of people to engage in those sports. Although I have an antipathy to some forms of human entertainment, I should never for a moment want to prevent others from enjoying them. The intrusion of people such as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North into other people's lives to an extent that is far greater than is necessary for the public interest is one of the worst features of the modern Labour party and of those who support the Bill.

A certain understanding, patience and tolerance are necessary if the life and freedom that we have cherished in this country for so long are not to be taken away by those who wish to impose their prejudices on others.

10.21 am

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): If that is the last speech made in the House by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), I can say only that it was a very appropriate one. Having advocated jungle economics for the past 31 years in the House, he now disposes of the matter by revealing his belief that cruelty to animals is a proper form of entertainment.

I have been here for 41 years and I have never had more letters on a subject than the number that I have received on animal rights. Although Conservative Members may find one or two postcards that did not come from their constituencies, I am sure that they will confirm that there is enormous support for the Bill. That support does not come from those who wish to prevent farmers from enjoying themselves. The support comes from people young and old—it is not confined to the young, although it is very strong among them—who believe that cruelty to entertain is wrong, and I share that view.

I remember a woman in her 50s with a bun and horn-rimmed spectacles coming to my surgery many years ago. She had worked all her life in a wool shop until her uncle left her some money. She told me that she had joined the hunt saboteurs. She had reflected when she had a little bit of freedom that her real wish was to stop the brutality against animals in the hunt. As a vegetarian and someone who has always supported animal rights, I feel that we have a duty in a representative assembly to reflect properly the feeling that exists.

If I had any doubts about the matter, the interventions by Conservative Members would resolve them. When the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) said that a million horses would be put down, that was a case for crime to avoid redundancy in the police force. If crime were abolished, the police would become redundant, so the House should endorse the continuation of crime—I have never heard such an absurd argument in my life and it carries no weight.

The House would be very unwise to disregard the pressure that lies behind the Bill because it is part of a wider and growing concern that the human race has a duty to protect the planet and the other species that live on it. Whether one goes back to the book of Genesis where it describes the creation of the earth and how

> "God saw that it was good",

whether one looks to the Levellers of the 17th century who said that the earth was

> "a Common Treasury, to preserve Beasts, Birds, Fishes, and Man"

or whether one goes to the modern statements, one discovers that young people realise that the human race cannot survive unless it is concerned about the rain forest, whales, elephants, badgers, foxes and everything else. I strongly share that feeling.

I have read, as others may have done, a marvellous book written 40 years ago by a man called E. S. Turner which is entitled "Roads to Ruin". He went through all the reforms that had been advocated in the House and listed the arguments against them. A book was issued in favour of torture and was dedicated by permission to the Chief of the General Staff. Some argued for hanging, drawing and quartering. Some argued for chimney boys to prevent fires in stately homes. Samuel Plimsoll, who advocated a safety line to protect seamen, was described in the shipping gazette as a terrorist.

The history of reform is simple. First, an argument for reform is brought forward, as in the Bill, and it is ignored. It is then denounced as mad and, after a pause, it is dangerous. There is then another pause after which one cannot find anyone who does not claim to have thought of it in the first place. When the Bill is on the statute book—as it will be before the end of the century, if not before the general election—people will look back and read the speech by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury and the other speeches made by those who favour hunting. They will not be able to persuade their children that such arguments were put forward by civilised men and women. They will be right not to do so.

10.26 am

Dame Janet Fookes (Plymouth, Drake): It will not surprise hon. Members to know that, as a long-standing member of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and of its council, I support the Bill and am a sponsor of it. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on the breadth of his speech.

I will deal with one or two general points of principle before I consider the Bill in more detail. One argument produced this morning is that, as we cannot prevent cruelty or suffering within the natural animal kingdom to some extent, we ourselves should not intervene to prevent cruelty by man against animals. I take the view that, although we may not be able to deal with all those things, there is a duty on us to ensure that there is no unnecessary cruelty or suffering. The word "unnecessary" is very important. There may be occasions on which suffering is necessary in the greater good, but we should do our utmost to limit it as far as possible.

It shocks me that, although there is the Protection of Animals Act 1911 for England, and similar legislation a year later for Scotland, which protect domestic or captive animals, there is no general body of law that does the same for wild animals. That loophole should long since have been dealt with and I am grateful that we have a Bill that

[Dame Janet Fookes]

goes some way towards dealing with that, although hon. Members will recognise that the Bill applies only to mammals.

I turn now to the issue of the hunting of animals with hounds and coursing. We hear lurid stories about the death of the animals, although those who hunt insist that the death is instantaneous and reasonably painless. I suggest that the real cruelty comes from the exhaustion of the chase and from the extreme stress that that places on the animal concerned It is known that there is a condition that can caused deer, for example, to die from shock even if they are not caught. We have no right to inflict that sort of suffering.

I am not interested in the entertainment issue. I am concerned only with the plight of the animals. If it is awful to hunt and to course, it is extremely cruel to snare animals. We know that under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 certain types of snare are forbidden, and I believe that all snares should be forbidden. In this regard I would part slightly from the hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, North. I would not allow any exemptions to snaring such as are permitted in his Bill under licensing laws. That, however, is a matter which will be properly resolved in Committee. It is in a sense a minor point of difference but I want to set it on the record.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Would my hon. Friend say that her principles, which she obviously holds sincerely, apply equally to shooting and fishing?

Dame Janet Fookes: Although my hon. Friend's question does not apply to the Bill, it is a fair one to ask. I believe that there is what I would call a scale of cruelty. It is—*[Interruption.]* Some people may laugh, but there are some forms of cruelty that are much worse than others. I would place hunting, snaring or torture of an animal much higher on the scale than shooting. As for my personal views, I would not seek to place on the statute book any legislation that dealt with either shooting or fishing, but one would certainly expect there to be a code of good practice for those who engage in those activities. Those are my views on the subject.

I hope that I am realistic. I believe that there is general agreement on matters such as hunting, snaring and coursing, but I recognise that different views are held on the shooting of animals.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): My hon. Friend has introduced an interesting element into the debate by referring to a scale of cruelty to wildlife. I appreciate that a deer or even a fox might be under considerable stress during a chase, but would not those same considerations apply to a salmon or a trout that is fighting desperately to avoid being caught by a fisherman?

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman would eat the salmon but not the fox.

Dame Janet Fookes: I shall not go down that road, which is a diversion. It does not come within the contents of the Bill. I sought to help my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) by describing my general views, but we are debating a Bill on which we shall have to make up our minds at the end of the debate. I do not wish to be sidetracked. There is sufficient in the Bill to occupy us and to give us reason to fight for what is set out within it. Nothing else should intervene.

It is becoming increasingly clear that it is suggested that hunting foxes is a form of pest control. That argument has already been dealt with effectively. During a year, about 12,500 foxes out of a population of 250,000 to 500,000 are killed in hunts. That cannot be regarded as efficient. Lest anyone dispute the figures, they are not mine; they were given by a Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I believe that hunting is extraordinarily inefficient as well as cruel. If it is necessary to deal with foxes, my preference would be for shooting in controlled circumstances, and I shall explain what I mean. I believe that such shooting should in the hands of those who are skilled and that they should use a proper weapon. I know that there is the question of licences, but shooting with a rifle by a skilled and responsible person is the most effective practice. It is possible to put out bait for a fox so that it will come to the person with a rifle. That offers a very good chance of getting a clean kill. There is one other method, about which I read with interest. It was described in an article that appeared in the *Shooting Times and Country Magazine*, I think. It was written by a gamekeeper, who suggested that it was better to "lamp" foxes. At night they can be made still by a powerful glare of light and then shot humanely, if it is necessary so to do.

There is considerable evidence—not produced by animal welfare groups or extremists—from scientists of repute that suggests that much of the ill fame of the fox is extremely nebulous. In many instances, when it is believed that foxes have taken a live lamb, it transpires that they have taken a dead or dying lamb. I am not suggesting that that is always the case, but considerable evidence suggests that most is carrion rather than live. Where there is the problem of a rogue fox or foxes, I believe that it is proper to shoot it or them in the way that I described.

There are other small wild mammals that have been treated cruelly. I shall not rehearse the examples that have been given, because I am aware of the pressure of time. It seems appalling that no organisation such as the inspectorate of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or the police is able to bring a case against somebody who tortures an animal for no reason other than to get some sadistic pleasure from doing so. Such a person cannot be caught by the law. We must close that atrocious loophole.

I am aware that some of the opposition to the Bill is based less on what it contains than on the belief that it is the thin end of the wedge. I heard that expression used earlier. I do not believe that it is the thin end of the wedge. If the Bill is enacted, I believe that we shall do a great deal to end cruelty to animals and unnecessary suffering, and I stress the word "unnecessary".

I hope that there will be good support for the Bill and that it will at least move into Committee, which will show the House and the public that these matters can no longer be left on one side but must be tackled quickly.

10.48 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Like many people outside the House, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, (Mr.

McNamara) for taking the opportunity, which comes rarely to any of us, to propose such an important piece of legislation. I am also grateful that he had the wisdom to ensure that people outside saw that the Bill had cross-party support and that he asked me to be a sponsor. I am very happy to be a sponsor of the Bill. For the record, the Bill has support from Members of four parties in the House representing many parts of Great Britain. It is an indisputable fact that it has also been shown to have overwhelming support among the public according to all records of British public opinion.

The point made by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) in his point of order deserves to be dealt with quickly. There may be one or two people who have acted improperly in lobbying for or against the Bill. I know not. But I can tell the House that even in areas such as mine, where one might think that such issues do not exercise the minds of people as strongly as they do in the rural communities of Great Britain, subjects such as fox hunting are more important issues. I have checked on the electoral register everyone who has written to me. The overwhelming majority of a considerable correspondence in cards and letters from my constituents expresses support for the Bill. Only three letters from my constituents, which I have recorded specifically, expressed opposition to it. They represented a total of 14 people, 13 of whom opposed the Bill because they misunderstood its application to shooting. That left one constituent who opposed the Bill because he thought that the hunting of foxes with hounds was acceptable and that the Bill threatened things which he regarded as important.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): The hon. Gentleman is right to stress the all-party support for the Bill. Will all his colleagues in his party vote in the same Lobby as him when it comes to a vote?

Mr. Hughes: I suppose that it says something about the sequence in which I intended to make my points that the hon. Gentleman's point was the next one with which I intended to deal. My view is clear: I support the Bill and will vote for it. Like the hon. Member for Plymouth, Drake (Dame J. Fookes), I hope that the Bill goes into Committee and proceeds as far as possible. We all recognise that it may not complete its stages because of the imminence of the general election. However, giving the Bill a Second Reading today will give a clear signal to the country. I shall come to the point about my colleagues in a moment.

One reason why I support the Bill is that, although I represent an urban seat, I was brought up in the country and, after watching a hunt, I asked myself whether hunting was appropriate. When I was a teenager, the hunt met a mile from my home in south Wales on Boxing day and other days of the year. It had a superficial attraction. The hunt was entertainment and a spectacle. But one had to ask what were the implications of what was happening. It was from that time on that I formed a clear view that hunting was not an appropriate activity for civilised human beings.

When I became a barrister, I prosecuted for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and was happy to do so. Coincidentally, I am now the Member of Parliament for the League Against Cruel Sports and I am very happy to be the Member for the constituency in which the league's headquarters is based.

The Liberal Democrats have a party view that is opposed to hunting. That has been made clear at two conferences since the Liberal Democrats were formed by the merger of the Liberal party and the Social Democratic party in 1988—one in March 1989 and the other last September. The party policy was remitted to an animal protection working group which is currently working on further detail. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North has beaten us to it. I went to the last seminar of that working group. It will produce a full policy paper which will go into more detail on animal protection issues than our present policy. Unfortunately, that will not now be before the election. *[Laughter.]* I am being straightforward. We have a policy and I have said what it is. I have made it clear. However, further work will be done.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) asked how my colleagues would vote. Our position is the same as that of the Labour party and, as I understand it, that of the Conservative party—there is no party line on the way in which Liberal Democrat Members should vote on the Bill. My party has a free vote in every vote in the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] No. All my hon. Friends will confirm that. Although there is a procedure for establishing a party line—*[Laughter.]*—every vote is a free vote. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may ask any of my colleagues. For us, every vote is a free vote. But, of course, on some issues there is a party line *[Laughter.]* It is an important point about the conscience of Members of Parliament which hon. Members might understand if they looked into political history. I should have thought that they understood anyway. The answer to the question of the hon. Member for Erdington is that for Liberal Democrats today there will be a free vote. If we introduced legislation, as I would wish us to do, there would be also a free vote on that. I understand that that is what the Conservative party and the Prime Minister have conceded should happen today and that the Labour party is also committed to a free vote.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: The hon. Gentleman has told the House something of great importance and use to us—that every vote is a free vote in his party. Does he accept that, in the previous Session, on more than 70 per cent. of occasions his party voted with the Labour party? Therefore, there will be no difference between voting Labour and voting Liberal in the next election.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is very interesting, but it does not help us to make progress on the Bill.

Mr. Hughes: If I were allowed, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would more fully answer that point. For now, I simply observe that Opposition parties normally vote against any Government more often than not.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: No. Let me get on.

I should add for the record that the most substantive legislation on preventing cruelty to animals—the Protection of Animals Act 1911—was enacted by a Liberal Government. The only reason why that Act did not contain the full panoply of powers to protect wild animals was that this issue was also controversial at that time. There was opposition to the Bill within our party as well

[Mr. Hughes]

as in other parties, so wild animals were not included. That Act is part of the Liberal party's record of which we are justly proud.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made the substantive and key principled point—that human beings have a duty the world over to be responsible towards and to look after those creatures that have no votes and are not human beings. That is why in Parliament we are rightly exercised about creatures abroad such as whales and the African elephant or, at home, badgers and otters. That is why increasingly over the years we have legislated to protect various creatures in Britain. The hon. Member for Drake made the valid point that we have generally failed to protect creatures in Britain, other than domestic animals, from cruelty in many forms because they were not included in the 1911 Act.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): What about battery farming?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman raises another equally valid point. If there were general legislation against cruelty, many forms of cruelty such as inhumane conditions during the transmit of animals and factory farming would rightly also be outlawed.

The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) made a poor point about the principle behind the Bill. The principle governing cruelty to wild mammals is different from that relating to boxing and attending football matches. Human beings rightly have the choice whether to box or hunt. But in hunting the other party—the fox—has no choice. That is the fundamental difference between hunting and boxing and other forms of sport or entertainment that involve only human beings.

The fundamental issue is cruelty against other creatures in our animal kingdom. It is the right to have a debate about what activities should or should not be permitted. Of course, we could have a debate about whether shooting or fishing should be acceptable. However, two fundamental points made this a different debate. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) made one of those obvious points from a sedentary position. One factor which makes shooting and fishing for most purposes a different issue is that we often shoot and fish to eat; we do not hunt foxes to eat. The second factor is that the balance of the arguments on cruelty and conservation is substantially different in each of these activities.

Let me make it abundantly clear for example, that I believe that, in certain circumstances, it is perfectly appropriate to shoot to conserve stock or to protect other creatures. The arguments for that are valid. I have met representatives of the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and have been out with them, and I understand the issues. There are different arguments which justify fishing.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): The hon. Gentleman has just said that we do not kill foxes to eat. We do, however, kill foxes to enable people to eat. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to an incident that occurred a couple of weeks ago in Ratby in my constituency, where an entire chicken coop was wiped out by a fox. In Leicestershire, the natural recourse is to turn to the fox hunt, which has always controlled foxes.

Mr. Hughes: That is a perfectly proper argument, but one has to decide the best way of dealing with the minority of foxes and other animals which are predators and destroy chickens and other animals which may also be potential food. I ask the hon. Gentleman to look at the statistics, which show overwhelmingly that, for all sorts of obvious practical reasons—not least that one cannot ride a horse to hounds and hounds through a chicken farm—hunting is not the best way to deal with foxes. If something needs to be done—the Bill accepts that principle—controlled shooting is preferable. The other argument against the hon. Gentleman's assertion is that the relationship between the number of foxes caught and killed by a hunt and such incidents is minimal.

Most people go hunting for entertainment and exercise, and the House must ask itself whether in 1992, in a civilised country, it is appropriate to allow people to hunt and injure or kill foxes principally for entertainment and exercise. I believe that the answer to that is a resounding no.

What are the arguments against the Bill? First, it is argued that it would produce 14,000 to 16,000 redundancies in the rural community. I do not accept that by preventing horses and hounds from being used for hunting, one prevents them from being used. That is not logical. Many people ride and keep hounds, and farriers and people who work in stables will continue to be needed. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) made an absolutely outlandish claim which I hope has already been rubbished by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield. There is no logic in the argument that if one prevents hunting, people will suddenly kill horses. If people are concerned about animals—particularly horses—they will not kill them just because they cannot ride them to hounds. People who ride say that they do it because they love horses; they are hardly likely to turn on them and put them all to death. Moreover, there are all sorts of ways in which we could make up for any minimal reduction in work in the rural communities. I am happy to send the hon. Member for Harborough a copy of a cutting from the *Hull Daily Mail*—the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North will have seen it; it is from his own area—in which local farrier Baz Brashill, dealing with the question, "Would I lose my job?" was reported as saying:

> "They are saying my business will suffer if fox hunting is banned, but that is absolute rubbish. It would only affect me a tiny bit, if at all."

That reflects the balance of work for nearly all our farriers.

The second argument against the Bill is that hunting preserves much of Britain's rural heritage—hedges, fields, trees and so on. Again, all the evidence, including that from the Government, makes it clear that hunting and the other activities dealt with in the Bill make a minimal contribution to the preservation of the countryside.

The third argument against the Bill is that it would destroy the best traditions and ways of the countryside. But many traditions either are no longer valid or never have been valid. Personally, I think that the unelected House of Lords is an invalid tradition. Moreover, one does not have to support something just because it is a tradition. One must ask oneself whether it is logical, principled and justifiable. Over the years, the case has been well demonstrated in Southwark. Southwark used to be the centre for bear baiting and cock fighting; they were traditions. People spent their free time engaged in such activities. Thank God, we are now a more civilised country and those activities are now banned. Many local authorities of all political parties have now banned hunting on their land.

The fourth argument against the Bill is that it would prevent any shooting of predators—that it is the thin edge of the wedge. First, an examination of the Bill does not support that assertion and, secondly, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North and the sponsors of the Bill have made it clear that we are prepared to make it even more explicit in the Bill that shooting, as sport and for conservation purposes, would be perfectly permissible. The Bill is about the prevention of cruelty—to prevent cruelty to mammals, many of which are left maimed as opposed to dead—and unnecessary cruelty at that.

Penultimately, it is argued that we must oppose the Bill if we are to protect mammals. That is a contradictory, argument. I ask those who really want to listen to the arguments for and against the Bill to examine those advanced by the hunting lobby. The first is that foxes are a pest and need to be culled and controlled. The second, contradictory, argument is that, without hunting, the foxes' habitats would disappear, leading to the decimation of the fox population. One cannot have it both ways. Either the fox is a menace poised to overrun rural areas or it is a species in danger. It cannot be both at the same time.

One is left with the final argument as to whether hunting is a necessary alternative to shooting; other alternatives are not legal. The RSPCA has made it clear that of the 1,448 foxes collected by the inspectorate in 1981, none of the 983 sick and wounded foxes were suffering from gangrene as a result of shotgun wounds. They were suffering from injuries as a result of being hunted but not killed.

Mr. Tony Banks: And snares.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, but not shotgun wounds.

All things considered, it seems to me that the arguments are overwhelming and conclusive. The Bill is a matter of principle for the House to decide. The Bill permits exceptions but they do not invalidate the principle. There are also qualifications, which show that the promoter of the Bill and its sponsors are neither illogical nor unreasonable human beings. We have clearly said that the Bill is not about fishing or shooting. It is about the further protection of living creatures which we have not so far taken steps to protect. Civilised legislatures vote in favour of protecting those who have no voice. We ought to protect them under the present Bill and I hope that it will receive overwhelming support.

10.57 am

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I have listened to the arguments advancesd advanced by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). The most ludicrous part of his speech was his attempt to differentiate between fox hunting on the one hand and shooting and fishing on the other by saying that, to use Oscar Wilde's term, foxes were the uneatable. The hon. Gentleman should remember that the largest group of people who indulge in such activities are the coarse fishermen, who catch fish that is, by definition, uneatable, so the hon. Gentleman's argument falls immediately.

I begin by declaring my interest. The House knows that I am a farmer and, like the vast majority of farmers in Britain, I am happy for hounds to hunt over my farm—principally because I like to see them. I do not indulge in fox hunting and I am not connected with a hunt. I have never seen a coursing match or a stag hunt in my life, but I am most concerned about the Bill.

I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said at the start of his speech. He said that he is prepared to enter negotiations in Committee with regard to pest control. I am not prepared to support a Bill that is as vague as this, on the undertaking that there will be some sort of negotiations at a later stage. I have serious anxieties about the ability of farmers in particular and of a number of other people in general, especially householders, to control pests. I understand that, as a result of the way that the Bill is framed, lawyers have questioned the future of rabbit shooting, because of the danger of those animals being wounded. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] Many farmers in the eastern part of the——

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In view of the serious allegations of mismanagement of the insurance market at Lloyd's, allegations substantiated by Conservative Members, and in view of the importance of Lloyd's to our invisible balance of payments and the importance of London as a financial centre, can you clarify whether a Minister has considered the matter important enough to come to the House this morning to make a statement.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have to tell the hon. Lady that Mr. Speaker has not been informed that a Government Minister is seeking to make a statement.

Sir Gerrard Neale (Cornwall, North): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether Mr. Speaker has received any intimation from the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) that he wishes to make a statement regarding the details that have been published relating to a former research assistant. It is an important matter and it seems conceivable that he would be able to explain fully to the House exactly what happened. Given the incidence of political advisers being appointed by members of all parties—*[Interruption.]*—and the fact that——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Let me hear the point of order.

Sir Gerrard Neale: The incidence now of political advisers being appointed by all political parties seems potentially to give rise to the question of a conflict of loyalty and interest regarding the subsequent appointment of these people to civil service positions.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The point of order for me is whether Mr. Speaker has received a request from an hon. Member to make a statement. The answer is no, Mr. Speaker has not received any such request.

Mr. Jopling: I was questioning the effect of the Bill as it stands on the ability of people to control pests. I think in particular of hares—a well-known scourge of sugar beet in the eastern counties of this country. That has nothing whatever to do with coursing. As for rats, the Bill as it stands leaves what is permissible very much open to doubt —whether it be shooting, poisoning or trapping.

One suggestion has been made which, to begin with, I thought was absurd. However, as I read the Bill, I began to see that there was something in it. A lawyer had

[Mr. Jopling]

suggested that, as the Bill stands, it might be illegal to put a cat into a granary that had a plague of mice. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Anyone who has seen a cat playing with a mouse will agree that that involves a good deal more cruelty than fox hunting. However, I shall deal with that point later.

The Bill has serious shortcomings. Clause 8 provides for registration and for licences to carry out pest control in different ways. When agriculture is experiencing great difficulties, this is not the time to saddle farmers with new restrictions of this kind. It is no good to say that, under clause 8, farmers will be able to obtain licences to become self-employed destroyers of vermin.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My right hon. Friend has made an extremely valid point. Another point that has not been made thus far in the debate is that most of the hunting on the North Yorkshire moors is done on foot. Were we not to control the fox population by that method, since no other method is viable, the farmers in that part of the country would suffer serious consequences.

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend must be a thought reader. That was precisely the point to which I was about to turn. I am most concerned about the effects of the Bill on fox hunting.

One point that has already been made in part, but which needs to be emphasised, is that the death of a fox by fox hunting—I refer to its death, not to the stress—is quicker and more certain if it is killed by hounds than if it is poisoned, wounded by shooting, or trapped. We start from that point of view.

To come to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), the Labour party included in its manifesto at the last election the promise that it would ban fox hunting, but there was the exception to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) referred about national parks. My right hon. Friend made a cynical comment: that that may have been because the hon. Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), whose constituencies adjoin mine in Cumbria, have a large number of constituents who hunt on foot on the fells.

I do not believe that it was due to political pressure on their part. I believe that the Labour party did that for perfectly good agricultural reasons: because it recognised that it was impossible to control foxes in upland areas without the use of hounds.

The Bill is different from the Labour party's proposal in its last election manifesto, since that exception is not included. The Bill would ban fell fox hunting—foot hunting—which the Labour party would have exempted. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North was kind enough to say that, in future, it will be possible for hounds to hunt foxes, provided the hounds are on leashes. I am sure that that will bring great comfort to the fell packs in the Lake district. The thought of those hounds hunting up and down the mountains on the end of leashes is just too ludicrous for words.

My strong view is that sheep farming in our upland and mountainous areas would become impossible if there were no hunting by hounds. Last year, I had discussions with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) about the Badgers Bill. I made that point to him, and he sought to argue it with me. Therefore, I invited him to John Peel country, where my constituency is, to talk to the farmers so that they could explain to him how important hunting is if foxes are to be kept down in such areas.

Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman, who kindly accepted the invitation, could not come at the last minute. It was a great disappointment. I do not blame him at all. I perfectly understand why he was unable to come. It was just a pity that he could not come. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Tony Banks: I was not going to rise, but from a sedentary position I heard somebody say that I was frit. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Sir M. Jopling) knows that that is not true. I do not know who said that, but the fact is that I am certainly not frit. My reasons were connected with the fact that my wife, who was coming with me, was too busy working in the hospital. Therefore, I had to pull out. I deeply regretted it. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman might even contemplate renewing his invitation. I shall damn well make sure that I am there this time, and I shall take whoever said that with me.

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman knows that I did not criticise him for being unable to come. I merely expressed my disappointment. If he would like to come this year to the Lake district sheepdog trials, of which I hope I shall continue to be president, he will be most welcome.

The basic argument is whether hunting by hounds is essential for sheep farming in these upland areas. Some people say that one cannot prove that it is essential. I believe that I can prove this morning that it is essential, and that I can give chapter and verse to demonstrate my point.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I understand that the right hon. Gentleman was formerly a Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Is he aware that studies into fox predation of sheep have shown that in Northern Ireland, where hunting is not so important, 95 per cent. of hill sheep farmers reported no loss of sheep? In addition, the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology has shown that fox hunting is an ineffective way to control foxes in the upland areas. When all those independent reports state that fox hunting is not effective, why does the right hon. Gentleman think that it is?

Mr. Jopling: I was about to show, from a case history, that fox hunting is essential. If the hon. Gentleman visits the fell packs in the Lake district and on the North Yorkshire moors and talks to those who run the hounds, he will discover that farmers frequently contact the hunt and say, "I am losing lambs; please bring the hounds to control the foxes." The case law that demonstrates my point can be found in *Hansard*, at column 1522 on 16 October 1941.

At the beginning of the war, a Mr. Harry Roberts was huntsman for the Plas Machynlleth hounds in west Wales. He was called up to the Army. Within two years, the foxes were so hopelessly out of control in that part of west Wales that large numbers of lambs and chickens were being taken. In the end, the War Agricultural Executive Committee petitioned the Government for the release of Mr. Roberts from the Army.

The then Ministry of Agriculture, together with the local Members of Parliament—which included Mr.

Clement Davies—who may or may not have been leader of the Liberal party at the time—pressed for the release of Mr. Roberts in the interest of the war effort. He was released from the Army, and questions about that were asked in the House. The issue was taken up by "Picture Post", which made a feature out of the return of Mr. Roberts to keep the foxes under control. That is the most compelling evidence to prove that hunting is absolutely essential in the upland areas.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Mr. Roberts was not the only huntsman released for that purpose?

Mr. Jopling: I was unaware of that, so I am grateful to my hon. Friend for doubling the strength of the evidence.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, to this day in north-east Scotland, there is an itinerant pack of hounds that is called up by the farmers? It moves from place to place in a part of the country that has many keepers and others involved in the control and conservation of game. They need a pack of hounds to do the necessary work for them, because there is no other way to control the foxes.

Mr. Jopling: That adds to the evidence, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his information.

Mr. Ron Davies: I have listened with great interest and amusement to the right hon. Gentleman's half-century-old anecdote. The thrust of his argument is that, in the uplands, especially at lambing time, hounds are necessary to control the fox population. Presumably he is referring to the lambing period of late March, April and early May, when the problem of foxes is most acute. Can he explain why, at the very time that he claims that his evidence shows that there is a problem with foxes because the ewes are lambing, the hunts stop hunting and declare their close season?

Mr. Jopling: The ewes are brought off the fells to have their lambs in the lowlands. After they have spent a few weeks there, they go back to the fells. That is when the foxes take the young lambs. It is perfectly simple.

Mr. Ron Davies *rose*——

Mr. Jopling: No, I have given way enough.

Mr. Davies: The right hon. Gentleman did not take my point. At the very time that he asserts economic damage is done, the hunts declare their close season. They stop killing the foxes. Why is that?

Mr. Jopling: The hunts operate at a time when there are lambs, and they deal with the foxes.

If fox hunting is banned, I suspect that there will be a massive increase in the fox population in the upland areas, and that will cause even more damage to the sheep population. However, I think that the opposite will be true in the lowlands, where I suspect there will be fewer foxes.

Sir Gerrard Neale: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jopling: No, I have given way more than anybody else.

From our discussions this morning, I have the impression that some of the Bill's supporters—not all—are motivated as much by revulsion at the supporters and the followers of hunts as they are at any cruelty that might occur. There was an extraordinary article in "Horse and Hound" on 30 January. Mr. Richard Course, formerly a chairman of the League Against Cruel Sports, wrote:

> "The plain fact is that the abolition of foxhunting, or any other form of hunting with hounds, will not make a hap'orth of difference to animal welfare."

That is a fundamental point, made by someone with great experience.

Like other hon. Members, I have had letters from my constituents asking me to support the Bill. Some of those letters refer to those people who follow hounds—whether on foot, on horse or even by car—as bloodthirsty, sadistic monsters. I hope that the House will understand that nothing could be further from the truth about those thousands of country people who like to follow the hounds, although not necessarily on a horse. Indeed, as I have said, in many areas such as the Lake district there is little hunting. Those people are doing what their forbears have done for centuries and they are perplexed about why those activities should be in danger of becoming a criminal offence. I, too, do not understand why they should become a criminal offence. The Bill is a serious mistake and I oppose it.

11.18 am

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): There is a spread of opinion in any constituency. I represent a significant rural area. One of the arguments against those who oppose cruel sports is that they all come from urban parts. That does not apply to me or, indeed, many other hon. Members who support the Bill.

Some of my local farmers support hunting. They do not try to justify the cruelty of fox hunting, but they have an attachment to the tradition of field sports. The letters have received and discussions that I have had with my constituent farmers have been conducted in a perfectly reasonable, logical and courteous way. I appreciate the points that they have made to me. When I say to them that the bottom line of all the arguments is how they can justify inflicting prolonged pain and stress on an animal for no reason other than the enjoyment of the human tormentors, even they accept that that is hard to do.

I shall put to rest once and for all one or two of the issues raised in the debate. There is the question of cruelty. Some hon. Members who have spoken against the Bill have not taken into account, in considering various sports that involve killing animals, that here we are talking about the deliberate infliction of cruelty. That does not apply to sports such as shooting. Although it may be true that some birds could be winged and may not be killed outright, people who shoot do not go out with the purpose of inflicting deliberate cruelty. Therefore, the argument is not the same. Nor, indeed, is the argument the same for fishing. Fishermen do not set out to inflict deliberate cruelty. One or two hon. Members need biology lessons on the physiology and nervous system of fish compared with that of a medium-sized mammal such as a fox.

We have debated the legal definition of cruelty. Not one hon. Member would dispute that if a bunch of yobbos set a pack of dogs on a cat, they would go to gaol. That is legally defined as cruelty. Yet the principle of setting dogs on a fox is no different from that of setting dogs on a cat or a sheep. The only difference is that cats and sheep are covered under the legal definition of cruelty and foxes are not. That is the very point which the Bill sets out to rectify.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

I certainly endorse what has been said about hedgehogs and other mammals. Naturally, cruel sports dominate the debate, but I know of cases of youths in my constituency who deliberately ride their motorbikes over hedgehogs and of people kicking hedgehogs around deliberately. Those serious issues need to be addressed.

We heard the argument about jobs. The hon. Member who talked about a million horses being slaughtered completely discredited the argument about the impact on jobs. Indeed, the cruel sports lobby has exaggerated the impact. I would not deny that some jobs are directly associated with hunts, but they amount to hundreds rather than thousands.

If people want to continue fox hunting as a sport, a tradition or a cultural, visual image, there is no reason why hunts cannot switch to drag hunting. It is not only better for the animals, but it is better for the horses as it is possible to ensure that a drag hunt goes over fences which constitute a reasonable jump for the horses. There is the further benefit that it is possible to keep the hounds away from houses. Many domestic pets and farm animals have been killed and many people's rights have been interfered with by hounds that have run amok.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): This morning, several hon. Members have raised the possibility of drag hunts. A drag hunt and a real hunt are not the same. A drag hunt is much more like a race. It is more akin to a point-to-point. It involves chasing round the countryside after a scented bag—so far, nobody has indicated who the scented bag is. Neverthless, a scented bag is drawn round the countryside first. I have been looking for an analogy to a drag hunt. Someone I know likened it to kissing one's sister, and he should know. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] There is no resemblance between drag hunting and proper hunting, and the hon. Gentleman should realise that.

Mr. Morley: I cannot comment on the hon. Gentleman's sexual habits. Of course, a drag hunt and a fox hunt are different. One of the differences is the lack of cruelty. Many keen horse riders would not dream of joining a fox hunt, because of their objection to the cruelty involved, but they would be happy to join a drag hunt. If people are concerned about rural employment, the introduction of drag hunts could increase employment. That is a better argument than saying that drag hunts would undermine the pleasure of the hunt.

Mr. Colvin: If that were so, there would be more drag hunts than there are. There are 10 drag hunts and many hundreds of proper hunts.

Mr. Morley: In fact, there are 12 drag hunts—and there are quite a few on the continent.

Is the only concern of those who follow fox hunts the blood, the cruelty and the killing? What sort of people are they if that is what is so important to them? We should look at the wider issue. I am concerned about the hon. Gentleman's point. If people want to keep fox hunts together, they can switch to drag hunting.

Before I was Member of Parliament, I was involved in nature reserve management. On odd occasions, foxes cause a problem. The Bill would not eliminate the right of individuals to take action against foxes by killing them humanely, either by shooting or by humane trapping. Both the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Scottish Office Agriculture Department have commissioned studies into the scale of the problem. The studies found that there was no significant predation problem from foxes. Studies by Aberdeen university, Bristol university and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology have all confirmed that organised fox hunting does not contribute to fox control in any way. Therefore, the argument that fox hunts serve a useful purpose in fox control is not true. It is not backed up by independent scientific evidence.

The habitat question has not featured much in our debate. Some of my farming constituents have made the valid point to me that many habitat features have been retained for the purpose of fox hunting. I think that that argument is somewhat exaggerated. Many copses are maintained more for shooting than for hunting. Moreover, when one considers the level of destruction of hedgerows, trees and so on, fox hunting does not seem to have done a good job in protecting them.

All hon. Members know of the major changes and reforms of the common agricultural policy. The kind of agricultural support in future will undoubtedly be for habitat protection and retention. Indeed, it will be for improving the habitat by planting hedgerows and trees. It is not true to say that a ban on fox hunting would affect the habitat.

Mr. Tredinnick: May I point out that the Quorn hunt in Leicestershire was given many coverts and woods specifically to save them from extinction? The Quorn meets and discusses how to protect that habitat. I think that there is a sub-committee specifically devoted to environmental protection of the woods in its hunt country.

Mr. Morley: I do not think that the Quorn hunt is a good example to include in this debate. I am sure that people involved in cruel sports have a love for the countryside and a respect for its habitat and visual image. I do not believe that if hunting were banned they would suddenly go out and start chopping down trees and woods, and ripping up hedgerows. I just do not believe that that would happen. What kind of people would do that? There are financial advantages for farming not only in maintaining but in improving the existing habitat. Therefore, that argument need not be taken into account.

I do not want to go on, as many hon. Members wish to speak. There is not one intellectual argument in favour of cruel sports such as fox hunting, deer hunting and hare coursing which can stand up to critical, independent and scientific examination. The bottom line is: can we justify the infliction of prolonged deliberate pain and stress on wild animals for fun—for the enjoyment of human tormentors?

Fox hunting and other cruel sports belong to a different age—one of barbarity. We live in a modern society and many so-called traditional sports such as bear baiting, bull baiting and dog fights have been banned. There is no difference between those sports and that of fox hunting—except, perhaps, that they happened in Southwark rather than in the rolling shires. The Bill is long overdue and it is welcome to the vast majority of the country. I hope that the House will support it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Standing Order limiting speeches to 10 minutes now comes into operation until 1 o'clock.

11.29 am

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I shall endeavour to contain my speech to less than 10 minutes. I agree with virtually everything that the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said, and I shall extend some of his arguments.

I am saddened that the Bill is seen as an anti-fox hunting one. In common with many of my hon. Friends, I see it for what it is—the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill. However, it is abundantly clear that some have sought to turn this debate into one for and against fox hunting. For that reason, I shall address that specific issue.

Those who are in favour of fox hunting argue that the Bill would damage conservation efforts. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe referred to that argument; I believe that he was the first hon. Member to do so. The hunt is held up as a shining example of conservation. However, according to the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council, since the war, 97 per cent. of traditional hay meadows have been destroyed as well as 99 per cent. of lowland heaths, 80 per cent. of chalk downlands, 80 per cent. of limestone grasslands, 80 per cent. of fens and mires, 90 per cent. of lowland ponds, 50 per cent. of ancient lowland woods and 150,000 miles of hedgerows. Many of those features existed on land owned or covered by hunts.

The Standing Conference on Countyside Sports has said that of all the reasons why landowners retain or plant woodland, creating fox coverts was the least significant. The chief motivating force was found to be the beauty of the landscape——

Sir Teddy Taylor: It was subsidies.

Mr. Gale: As my hon. Friend says, there are now other compelling set-aside reasons. People's concern about conservation has nothing to do with the hunt, but is a genuine desire to conserve the beauty of the land, which is loved by many.

It has been said that shooting is not an alternative form of controlling the fox population. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) argued that foxes represent a major threat to farming. However, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, over which my right hon. Friend presided with great distinction for a number of years, has estimated that the loss of lambs to foxes does not constitute an economically significant loss to the national farming community.

There has been much reference today to what are euphemistically regarded as the sporting connotations of fox hunting. The debate has been seen as one between town and country. I was brought up in rural Dorset and my family comes from Axminster in Devon. I have followed hounds on foot and many of my family have hunted in the past; some, I believe, still do. I do not believe that I am regarded by any of the farming community in my constituency as being either anti-farm or anti-countryside. I have come to the view—it is a considered one—that the time has come when the hunt must end. I studied the article that appeared in *Big Farm Weekly*, to which reference has been made, and I discovered that the farming community put hunting low down its list of entertainment and sporting priorities.

I have discussed the Bill with farmers in my constituency. Some of them are keen rural sportsmen and, not surprisingly, they were concerned that I might lend my support to a Bill that they believed would signal the end to their favourite sports of shooting and fishing. I can see nothing in the Bill that takes a step towards such a ban. To advance that argument is about as sensible as saying that the 70 mph speed limit on the motorway is tantamount to declaring that there will be a ban on motor cars next. Neither is true—it is a question of degree.

I am not opposed to shooting or fishing as long as they are subject to proper controls and conventions. I am, of course, opposed to bad shooting and bad fishing.

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): What is bad fishing?

Mr. Gale: Bad fishing was practised by those fishermen against whom the House legislated. They used to use lead shot, which poisoned the water and swans. They also used to leave their line across the water, which strangled wild fowl. That is bad fishing. There is such a thing and I am rather surprised that my hon. Friend does not recognise that.

Mr. John Townend: My hon. Friend is worried about cruelty to animals. Does he agree that to put a hook in the mouth of a fish, to play with it and then remove that hook and throw the fish back, so that the torture can recommence, is just as cruel as hunting?

Mr. Gale: I know that many people believe that. It would be naive not to suggest that some people who support the Bill also want to extend protection to fish and want an end to shooting and fishing. In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Dame J. Fookes), I do not want to see that happen. I do not believe that such a ban is envisaged in the Bill.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): Has my hon. Friend considered the implications for commercial fishing?

Mr. Tony Banks: That is not relevant to the Bill. It is out of order.

Sir Charles Morrison: It is relevant to what my hon. Friend said about cruelty. In commercial fishing, the fish are dumped on a deck where they die slowly, out of their element. How does he justify that?

Mr. Gale: I know that my hon. Friend takes a keen interest in such matters and I should be happy to debate it with him either in the Tea Room or when we debate a Bill to control fishing.

The Bill relates to cruelty to wild animals. Earlier this morning I heard Enoch Powell on the radio. I read with great interest his erudite article that appeared in *Countryweek* in which he said:

> "Nor do I wish to see the courts and the police mobilised to prevent pursuits which from my own experience I know can be the source of the greatest pleasure and the best friendship I have been blessed with.
>
> There are limits, of course. We have to restrain those who might otherwise present their neighbours with spectacles that revolt them."

Imagine if two members of the National Union of Mineworkers, to be emotive, took a whippet and a Jack

[Mr. Gale]

Russell and allowed them to chase a domestic cat down a sewer pipe. Imagine if they put the Jack Russell in that pipe to pull the cat out by its tail and they then threw the cat down the street so that a whippet could chase and kill it. That might just be the cause of revulsion to Conservative Members, as well as to others. I watched the video of the Quorn hunt and apart from the fact that the animal was a fox, not a cat, what I have just described was almost precisely what happened. I can only say to the House that having seen the video of the entire hunt I had just one word for those who practice such activities: contempt.

It has been suggested that the film of that hunt, which was shown on television, was somehow strangely edited. The video runs for about an hour and a half with pictures of the Quorn so-called hunting. I did not see any acts of equestrian courage: I saw a great deal of brutality and sequences of infinite boredom. If any of my hon. Friends has not had the opportunity to see that entire video, I have it in my office and I shall make it available.

There is an alternative to hunting, which has already been mentioned many times. I do not believe that it is necessary to end rural sports simply because we want to give protection to wild mammals. Nor do I believe that the Bill necessarily spells the end of riding and its associated industries—saddle making, the manufacture of riding clothes and so on. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) referred to drag hunting and said that it was not the same as fox hunting. I agree; it is not. But there is at least one distinguished hon. Friend who has been a master of drag hounds and who, while he does not entirely share my view that fox hunting should now end, believes that drag hunting is a worthwhile sport which should, and could, be promoted instead.

I have one minute left in which to speak and I have not even touched on the thrust of the Bill. The time has come when wild mammals must be given the same protection as the Protection of Animals Act 1911 gave domestic animals. We have extended that to cover otters and dormice as endangered species and some cover has been given in legislation to badgers. The time has come for us to go forward into the 21st century and recognise that fox hunting and associated so-called pleasures must end. I shall support the Bill and I hope that many of my hon. Friends will do likewise.

11.40 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It is a pleasure to speak following the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale). I agreed with every word of his speech, which proved that this issue does not divide the parties.

From my point of view, the Bill is providing a good day's sport. Here we are gathered in our traditional hunting fashion—drab grey with accompanying gravy stains—apart from the hon. Member for Plymouth, Drake (Dame J. Fookes) who struck a brilliant colour and made an equally brilliant speech.

It is encouraging to note the way in which the argument is uniting hon. Members in all parts of the House. At a time of high political tension, it is refreshing to note that there are issues that unite us and cut across the party divide. The Bill has all-party support. As a sponsor of it, I thank Conservative Members who have sponsored or pledged support for it.

Though unusual for me, I commend the article written by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark), the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, in *The Guardian* on Thursday, and I am glad to see him in his place. It was unfortunately entitled, "Closing in for the Kill," but I suppose that the hunters are realising what it is like to be hunted, and they do not like it. They are being hunted inside and outside the House and they can see that the opposition ranged against them is equally as formidable as a large pack of hounds, except that we do not intend to rip them to pieces at the end of the hunt.

This is not an issue of unity within the Labour party even. I have received two letters, one of which has been referred to, the first having come from Councillor Richard Course, a Labour councillor, who I assume has written to all hon. Members. He describes himself as the Labour leader of the environment committee and leader of the planning sub-committee locally. I hope that he discussed the matter with his colleagues on those committees before sending out the letter, and I hope that Councillor Course has not used Enfield ratepayers' money for the purpose. I have no doubt that the matter will be taken up with the leader of the Labour group.

I have also received a letter from Baroness Mallalieu, a Labour peer who has been telling my hon. Friends and I that she is

> "very concerned that we should be working together to win the election, not alienating the support that we have in rural areas, which we shall need in order to secure a good working majority."

I am not impressed by that, particularly as it comes from someone who failed to convince the electorate that she was worthy to be elected to this place. In the circumstances, I do not have much time for the Baroness Mallalieu.

The Bill is not just about fox hunting. It has been hijacked by a well-organised lobby outside working on behalf of the Field Sports Association, ably supported by some hon. Members. The Bill is about animal welfare and having respect for life forms other than our own. I suppose that in the end it is about morality, giving protection to wild animals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said, it is about giving the protection that domestic animals currently enjoy. It is a matter of principle and it is wrong that the present loophole should exist. We must now plug that loophole.

We are concerned with much more than just the activities of red-coated fools on horseback. The Bill is about the cruelty that other mammals have to suffer in the wild. I have before me some horrible evidence that has come to many hon. Members, though some has been sent specifically to me. One from Yorkshire is about hedgehogs being tortured to death. That involved schoolboys at Woldgate school in Yorkshire. It is disgusting what nasty little sadists can do. They should not be allowed to act in that way. So the Bill is not just about fox hunting.

Another case appeared in the *Daily Mail*, not a paper I am often heard quoting with respect in this place. It is about a man who battered a hedgehog to death and who was cleared in the court—I will name him because I want him to be famous—because, the article said:

> "Mr. Campbell, of High Street, Herne Bay . . . said, 'This has been a nightmare. I couldn't believe anyone would be serious about charges.'"

It may have been a nightmare for Mr. Campbell in court. It was nothing compared with the nightmare experienced by the hedgehog when he was beating it to death with a stick, which is what he did

"after a heavy drinking night . . . I realised what it was but to me a hedgehog is vermin."

I must tell Mr. Campbell of Herne Bay that he is the vermin. I hope that one day somebody gives him a good thrashing with a stick, and we will see whether he enjoys it.

Plenty of evidence is coming to us to show that the Bill will protect wildlife, and that is how and why we should be discussing it, rather than parts of the measure that would affect rural activities. The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) said that it was about banning entertainment. I suppose it is—the point I tried to make in an intervention—if one considers hunting an animal to death to be entertainment. It is not the sort of entertainment in which civilised people should indulge. No doubt it was entertainment to watch bears being baited or to watch cocks or dogs fighting. We banned those and we should put this so-called sport in the same category. Or is the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury suggesting that we should not have banned bear baiting, cock fighting and the like? I do not think that even he would suggest that.

It is suggested, as part of the argument for the need to control vermin, that foxes are vermin. I have given my definition of vermin, and it does not include foxes. Foxes are the largest predators of rats and rabbits, and certainly rats are considered to be vermin. In any event, if the argument is about controlling vermin, why are many hunts bringing foxes into their territories? I gather that there were no foxes on the Isle of Wight until they were introduced for hunting purposes. There were none in Australia, where they are now something of a menace, until they were introduced because people wanted to hunt them.

I have with me a list of hunts that are bringing foxes into their areas. They are the Beaufort, the Heythrop, the Cheshire, the Puckeridge and Thurlow, the Essex, the Cumberland Farmers, the Isle of Wight and the Bicester with Whaldon Chase. How can it be argued that we are talking about controlling vermin and that foxes are vermin when foxes are being bought in to provide a day's sport? It makes no sense.

In a land beset with unemployment, nobody would cheerfully commend anybody to the dole queue, but the numbers that have been thrown about, like the arguments of the hunting lobby, have been plucked out of the air. They do not bear examination and the idea that many thousands of people would be out of jobs is ridiculous, even in the light of the surveys carried out by the huntsmen.

The 1983 standing conference representing country sports showed, after that organisation had commissioned an inquiry, that there were only about 750 full-time jobs involved. Drag hunting will become far more popular after the Bill becomes law. Whatever is said about the number of drag hunts, there will be many more, and that is the way in which people will be able to indulge in the good sport of riding to hounds, on a horse, through the countryside.

I should like to do that—I do not get much chance to do it through the streets of Newham. I appreciate the attraction of that, and drag hunting will provide all of it. It will also provide the jobs, and the future for the million horses said to be involved. I do not know whether we have a million horses in this country, but either way, the horses that we have can be employed in drag hunting.

All the arguments are on the side of those who support the Bill and I am delighted that they are coming from my political opponents on the Government Benches, for this issue unites the House and the country. I believe that there is a vast majority in the nation in favour of the Bill.

The Bill will not get through the House because we shall have an election on 9 April—I pluck a date out of the air, perhaps with more accuracy than some of the arguments that Tory Members have plucked out of the air—but whoever wins the election, a Bill will be introduced to do precisely the same as this Bill and I shall be in the Lobby to support it then, as I shall be today.

11.50 am

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I do not shoot, fish or hunt, but I strongly oppose the Bill. My principal reason is that I passionately believe in individual freedom. If someone does not want to do something, that is his right, but he should not try to stop everyone else doing it. The House and society have had an unfortunate tendency, in recent years, to be busybodies, looking into people's lives.

I see the Bill in a wider context—as part of an orchestrated campaign to victimise a minority. I refer to the rural minority. Even in rural areas, most of the population are now from urban areas, commuters or retired. Hunting and other country sports are part of our traditional heritage and history. One has only to look at the wonderful paintings and etchings of the chase. The fact that those are minority pastimes is no argument for banning them.

Over the centuries, this country has developed a justified reputation for tolerance. The Bill will inevitably reduce tolerance of the views of others. I cannot help feeling that a certain amount of good, old-fashioned left-wing class prejudice is coming to the surface—*[Interruption.]* If the hunting scene were part of the culture of an ethnic minority, anyone who tried to stop it would be strongly attacked by the Labour party.

The Bill stinks of hypocrisy. If its supporters are so concerned about the sufferings of animals, why have they never brought in a Bill to ban ritual killings like halal, as practised in this country by some minorities? It involves suspending live animals by the legs and slaughtering them alive. The Opposition do not ban that, because they are petrified of losing votes. It is strange that left wingers oppose the complete integration of ethnic communities and call for the freedom to keep their traditions and cultures, yet try to prevent the countrymen of England from pursuing traditional country sports that have been followed by our forefathers for centuries.

The Bill is only the first stage in a concerted effort by the so-called animal rights lobby to ban all field sports. We have already heard the League Against Cruel Sports and the anti-hunting lobby say that when hunting is banned, they will move on to campaign against shooting and fishing. The Labour party will not admit that that will happen, because several million people who fish vote Labour. Once we start to ban, where will it end? The antis have said that they will go on to campaigning against shooting and fishing. How long will it be before they move on to boxing and wrestling? This country will become like it was in the puritan age under Oliver Cromwell.

[Mr. John Townend]

Whatever Labour Members say, the Bill will have a significant effect on economic prosperity in the countryside. That is particularly dangerous when all our farmers are under pressure. Although the amount of employment lost through the banning of hunting may not be great, if shooting and fishing are also banned, the tourist industry will be enormously affected. To introduce such measures now is economic madness.

The Bill is illogical. I do not know how anyone could support it on the ground of cruelty to animals and not answer the question why it does not include shooting and fishing. Why are mammals any different from birds or fish? It is surely more cruel to hook a fish, play with it, throw it back and repeat the torture than it is to hunt.

Labour Members seek to raise the rights of animals to the level of the rights of human beings. They say that fox hunting must be banned because it is entertainment, but one of the greatest entertainments in life is enjoyed by the majority of the country and by many Opposition Front-Bench Members, including the deputy leader of the Labour party, and that is eating. If one believes in animal rights, what is more cruel than to breed animals and eat them for enjoyment? The only logical stance of the Bill's supporters is to oppose all those sports and, eventually, to oppose the rearing of animals for meat.

I have no arguments with vegetarians, as their position is logical. The Bill, however, is illogical and hypocritical and, if it is passed, it will be another blow to individual freedoms. I hope that it is defeated.

11.57 am

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): It ill becomes Conservative Members to call the Labour party hypocritical. One of the arguments of the blood sports lobby is unemployment. Harking back to the memories of the great struggles of the past 15 years against unemployment in my constituency—the closures in the steel industry and the rundown of the mining industry—I cannot remember either of the two local hunts appearing on demonstrations or taking any part in the arguments against unemployment.

A key issue in the debate has been the odd contribution by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who talked about the difference between the two forms of hunting. That is what this debate is all about. There is the alternative of drag hunting, which preserves all the lovely, attractive pageantry of the hunt; the social occasion; and the great joy that young people experience from the healthy exercise of riding horses through the countryside. Those can be preserved in a way that does not upset the majority of people in the country. Drag hunting is also safer, as many accidents occur when foxes are hunted in a live quarry, because of the uncertain route that is followed. They can be avoided if human intelligence has had a hand in plotting the route.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside said that the difference between following a trail and following a live quarry is like kissing your sister. I have heard it expressed rather more graphically—that it is like making love without a climax. That is significant, because it points to what is behind the entertainment referred to by the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley). The whole purpose of hunting a live quarry is for people to get twisted and sordid pleasure out of killing an animal. That is the difference between the two sides in this debate. It is the only difference between those two methods of hunting.

I received a letter from a constituent opposed to the Bill. She is involved in the hunting business. She invited me to watch, if the Bill is enacted, the destruction of the hounds. I have seen the kennels where the hounds are kept, but the hounds will not be destroyed. A plea must be made for the plight of the hounds, because they suffer over a long period. Their lives are now very brief and are ended after a short period. They do not enjoy the normal lifespan of a dog, which can be 10 or 12 years. They live for a maximum of four years if they are lucky, and their reward for years of service is a bullet in the head. Perhaps the worst aspect of the hunting ritual is cubbing, in which the hounds are trained to kill. They do not do it naturally; they have to be trained by using the young cubs to bring the instinct out.

The nature of the foxhound is important—it is a creature bred to run more slowly than the fox. If it was as quick as the lurchers that are used for hare coursing, the hunt would be over in seconds. That might be a more efficient way of destroying the animal, but there would not be the fun and entertainment of the chase and the twisted—I would use the word "sadistic"—pleasure.

There is a great difference between the groups of people in hunting and the groups of people who love horses and horse riding. One of the most touching aspects of the matter has been the floods of letters that I have had from children and young people. I have not had one letter from anyone whom I could identify as a schoolchild which opposed the Bill. The sensitivity of the children in Clytha school, who sent me lovely pictures, and the children in Bassaleg comprehensive school in my constituency shows that they understand the issue. All the decent, compassionate instincts come welling out when they see what is happening. There is a generation divide in the country between those who understand the brutality of hunting and those who over many years have become blind to it.

The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) attempted to justify the continuation of hunting because of the destruction of lambs. That was a sad example of how desperate the threadbare argument is. He had to go back to *Picture Post*—back to the war. Even then, the story had other possible interpretations. In the war, many people, for understandable reasons, did not want to be at the front line. Many found pretexts for not going there, and excuses for coming back home.

The argument of the opponents of the Bill must be threadbare when they offer a single anecdote from the war to counter-balance the studies that have been made. Detailed studies were made in Scotland over five years, and they found that 24 per cent. of lambs in the highlands would be lost through stillbirth, malnutrition and hypothermia. Only 1 per cent., if that, are lost to foxes. The fox's traditional function in the countryside is that of a scavenger. Foxes take lambs that have no chance of continued life and those that are already dead, such as those that have been aborted.

A further three-year study of fox predation on lambs in Scotland found that leaving foxes in peace did not result in an increase in the number of lambs taken. We know that, in parts of the country where no fox hunting takes place, the number of foxes does not increase or decrease. The hunt is not a factor. There are whole countries in which fox hunting does not take place, and the number of foxes there are determined by the availability of the food supply.

All the arguments against the Bill are false and threadbare. They will convince nobody. We have heard welling up from the country a huge demand from people saying, "Let us take this small step forward in the progress of our civilisation." The past has always been brutal and cruel and progress has been faltering and slow. Today we are recognising and seeing with a new clarity the sordid, gratuitous cruelty of hunting, which has been tolerated for far too long. We shall take a step forward by giving this Bill a Second Reading today—a step forward in our civilisation.

12.3 pm

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): What strikes me as extraordinary about the debate is that, even if those who support the Bill have read it, they are not prepared to face its implications. None the less, I agree strongly with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that the human race has a responsibility to look after wildlife.

Indeed, the second remarkable aspect of the debate is the paradox that there is a great deal of common ground between those who support the Bill and those who are against it. Both sides are concerned with the well-being of wild mammals; the division between us concerns how best to achieve that end. The Bill's supporters believe that it can be done by more and more protection, whereas its opponents believe that it can be achieved only by management of wildlife.

There is nothing new about the attitude of the opponents of the Bill. The British countryside is not a pristine environment. Its appearance, and the birds and wildlife within it, stem from the fact that man has intervened for the past 5,000 to 10,000 years. For the past two centuries, much of that intervention has been undertaken by people who have enjoyed field sports. If the ecosystem that we now have is to be maintained, man's active and positive participation will continue to be a necessity.

That amounts to what the International Union for the Conservation of Nature has called conservation through wise use—a concept first promoted as a conservation tool by the world conservation strategy of 1980.

I wonder whether, before the Bill was published, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) attempted to consult the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the Joint Nature Conservancy Council, English Heritage or Scottish National Heritage, or organisations such as the British Trust for Ornithology or the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust.

We have heard about the Bill's implications for employment. There are now about 5 million participants in field sports and they support no fewer than 14,400 trade and service organisations. That represents a considerable amount of employment. Direct expenditure on countryside sports is about £1·4 billion. Indirect expenditure is about £1·2 billion. Much of that goes into the rural economy, which is quite impoverished enough without our taking any more out of it. Such is the extent of the participation, expenditure and employment that the sponsors of the Bill wish to destroy. That would be their achievement if it, or any similar successor, were ever to become law.

We know that the Bill would ban hunting, but it would also be a disaster for shooting—whatever its supporters may say—and it will threaten fishing. Worst of all, it will have a devastating effect on conservation.

It is a pity that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North did not pay full attention to the Scott Henderson report, which said, among other things:

> "fox hunting makes an important contribution to the control of foxes, and involves less cruelty than most other methods of controlling them. It should therefore be allowed to continue."

The hon. Gentleman poured scorn on that report, but I remind him that, since 1948, there have been several other Labour Governments. It would have been within their power to have another inquiry—although I have no doubt that such an inquiry would have come to a similar conclusion.

It is a pity, too, that the sponsors did not attempt to pay attention to Richard Course, who has already been referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). In *Horse and Hound* of 30 January, Mr. Course wrote:

> "When I became fully and objectively appraised of all the facts, and conversant with all related arguments, it was impossible to avoid the conclusion that the 'prosecution'—or the anti-Hunt case—would not advance 'fox welfare', and consequently it could not be justified."

It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman did not consider the hypocrisy of saying that it is unacceptable to hunt foxes with hounds, which ultimately leads to the fox's sudden death or escape, while continuing to support the slow death of rats from warfarin, as mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley).

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North said that he wanted to elevate the position of wild animals to that of domestic animals. In reality, far from being the cuddly animal depicted by some people, the fox, although attractive, is a barbarous and opportunistic murderer.

Hon. Members have spoken about hill farmers. One of my constituents, a farmer, wrote:

> "I have had many bad experiences with foxes at lambing . . . I had to go out every night at lambing with a high powered rifle. One night I saw seven foxes stalking lambs in the field."

That shows the level of damage done by foxes.

The Bill is a direct threat, albeit small, to fishing, because it sets out to protect mink. It is also an indirect threat, because if the Bill is enacted there is no doubt that before long we shall see anti-shooting and anti-fishing Bills.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): No.

Sir Charles Morrison: The right hon. Gentleman says no. He and some other hon. Members will not be here. It is naive to pretend that the League Against Cruel Sports will give up its battle against other field sports if the Bill becomes law.

Mr. Howell: The hon. Gentleman has been following sport with me for many years and I have never seen him make such an agitated speech. Whether I am here is immaterial. The Labour party in successive manifestos has made it plain not only that it will support angling but that it will take positive steps to clean up waters and give anglers much greater access to the countryside than they have been given by this Government.

Sir Charles Morrison: Labour policy has often changed; on this occasion, it would be change for the

[Sir Charles Morrison]

worse. I have no doubt that Labour's attitude to field sports would change as a result of pressure from organisations thatsimply do not know the realities of conservation.

The Bill would have a devastating effect on conservation. Foxes have a disastrous effect on wild birds. For example, research on Salisbury plain showed that up to 51 per cent. of hen partridges were killed every year. But the birds killed, a major loss to the partridge population, would not have formed even 1 per cent. of the annual diet of the foxes, which live mostly on rabbits and other such species.

The same is true of a wide range of bird species. Salisbury plain is one of the last resorts of the rare stone curlew in southern England. Nationwide, there are only about 160 pairs of that species. Where a handful of breeding birds desperately hang on, they are under constant threat from foxes. The Red Data Bird Book states:

> "Foxes appear to cause heavy egg and chick losses, particularly on semi-natural grassland. The recent increase in fox numbers in southern Britain, particularly in East Anglia where gamekeepers formerly kept the population at a low level, may seriously reduce stone curlew productivity."

The same is true of sea birds, and in a number of reserves, such as Scott head, Gibraltar point and the Ouse washes, foxes are controlled by wardens.

The avocet is the emblem of the RSPB, as the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who is a member of the council of that society, knows. The society reports on the effects of fox control measures on the production of young avocets at Minsmere. Where foxes were controlled, each pair of avocets fledged four times as many young as where foxes were not controlled. Therefore, foxes must be controlled and short-sighted legislation would prevent the effective control of such predators.

12.15 pm

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on his success. I wholeheartedly support clause 1 of the Bill and agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about that. He and other hon. Members have sought to lift us to the peaks of the moral high grounds. Perhaps we should also come down to the foothills of practicality. I shall speak about drag hunting, because I think that I am the only Member present who has been a master of drag hounds that hunted human quarry.

What I have heard in the debate about drag hunting amounts almost to nonsense.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester): Naivety.

Sir Richard Body: Thank you—that is the word.

It is difficult to persuade 30 or 40 farmers to allow a drag hunt over their land. I can vouch for that, because I spent many days trying to persuade my fellow farmers to allow our hounds to hunt over their land. I understand the difficulty. Hounds go over my land, and it can be a nuisance when 100 horses gallop over turf after rainfall and cattle need to graze on the land.

Several hon. Members will remember the late Reggie Paget who represented Northampton for many years. He had one simple test for any proposal on animal welfare: whether the proposal would cause the total amount of animal suffering to be more or less than at present. If it caused less suffering, he supported it, and if more he opposed it. He emphasised that one must have regard to the total amount of animal suffering and not just that inflicted on one species. That test enabled him to come down against shooting but to approve of hunting.

Some hon. Members have criticised colleagues for speaking about the war years. About half a century ago, I took part in my one and only fox shoot and the memory of that event is still vivid. During the war, fox hunting was curtailed and the hounds went out on two days a week instead of three. In those days, every farm in our area had a flock of free-range poultry, and many others had a few laying hens. The destruction caused by the increase in the fox population was great, and a party went out one morning on an organised fox shoot. At that time, a lad of 12 or 13 could lawfully have a shotgun, which is not the case now, and I was a member of that party. The guns blazed away all day and the shoot was well organised. We shot two foxes, and they were the lucky ones.

I was allowed by the farmers in the area to shoot rabbits over their land, and I was at liberty to roam over this large area of the fox shoot. Over the following two or three weeks, I saw six foxes that had died, unquestionably from gangrene. I regret to say that the fox is not a clean animal. If anyone is misguided enough to shoot a cat, the cat, being a clean animal, will lick its wounds and prevent the onset of gangrene. But a fox is not like that.

I wish that the Bill's supporters who believe that shooting a fox is desirable could see what I saw—emaciated, wretched animals that had died five, six or more days after the fox shoot. They had suffered a lingering death, which must have been most painful. As a boy 50 years ago—I am sorry to go back 50 years, because I know that Labour Members do not like it—I resolved that, if I ever had control over land, I would never permit the shooting of foxes. I have held to that resolve.

A few years ago, it was my turn to shut the chicken hut. Unfortunately, the Whips had changed the business of the House, and we had a vote at 7 pm. I got back late, and found a trail of feathers from the chicken house leading across the fields to a cover which told its own tale. I was rather angry, but when it was suggested the following morning that the fox should be shot, I composed myself sufficiently to say, "No, I think that the Whips should be shot."

The other predator is the mink, about which hardly a word has been said. The River Pang, a tributary of the Thames, goes through my land, and alongside it there has always been a good deal of wildlife. About 30 years ago, I set aside an area to be left undisturbed to see what would happen. I discouraged anyone from going in, so that it was left alone. Some 15 years ago—I am sorry to go back again, but it is important on this occasion—we had a mink. It was a few days before we realised that a pair of mink had come into what my neighbours kindly call—I am not pretentious enough to call it this—a wildlife sanctuary.

Once we realised that the mink were there, I got my son who was then aged 15 and a friend of his to shoot the two mink. It was three weeks before they were able to shoot one of them. There was a great deal of cover in the summer months, and it was difficult to get a shot at the mink. By the time the mink was shot—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may find that funny, but I do not. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."]

I wish that they could understand what I am saying. By the end of three weeks, all the wildlife had gone. The fish had gone from the river, the kingfisher had been killed and the water voles—I call them water rats, which is often misunderstood; which are delightful animals and no relation to ordinary rats—had all gone. The mallard had gone, and that little area of land was dead. It took eight years for the wildlife to return.

I ask those who support the Bill what advice they would give me if the mink returned. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shoot them."] Where at my age am I to find another 15-year-old son who can stand waiting for three weeks in the summer holiday? That is ridiculous. That would not work anyway, because after three weeks, all the wildlife would have gone. It is an absurd suggestion.

Apart from the cruelty of trapping, there is only one practical method, towards which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North is edging his way. The only practical and humane way is to use hounds. The hunt for a mink is not long. The longest period is when the hounds work along the line of a mink for a mile or two. When the hounds get fairly close, the mink may try to escape down an earth and may have to be dug out, which is not a pleasant business, although it is done only when the owners of the land ask for it to be done. The mink is more likely to climb a tree and then, with a bit of luck, one can shoot it. That is a very humane end.

If the Bill proceeds further in this Parliament or in the next, I hope that mink hunting will be removed from it. The case for mink hunting is overwhelming. I do not blame the mink, and I believe that it was a wretched, rotten individual who first brought the mink——

Mr. Denis Howell *rose*——

Hon. Members: No—there is no time.

Mr. Howell: I am sorry.

Sir Richard Body: I simply apply the test of the late Reggie Paget. I believe that the total amount of suffering in the animal kingdom will be not less but more if the Bill goes through in its present form.

12.24 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) spoke with great sincerity which showed that this has been a civilised debate. We are all aware that there are strong pressures and feelings outside. The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) said earlier that he had received an anonymous postcard and I am sorry about that. I have received a few strong letters. I received one telling me that I was consorting with communists in supporting the Bill and another saying that I was supporting socialist crackpots. Another said that I was "a repulsive creep", whatever that is, and another said—the most serious charge of all—that I was a disgrace to the Monday club.

Fox hunting is not an issue in which I had any real interest for many years. I took the view, shared with my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston, that if one had to control foxes, there was no harm in having that done by the hunt. It appeared to be an effective method which added some glamour and colour to the countryside. However, having visited a number of incidents involved with hunting and having studied the issue, I find that the case for fox hunting seems to fade away whenever it is exposed to any logical examination. There also seemed to be no doubt that the amount of cruelty involved, which is deliberate cruelty, is grotesque.

One of the great arguments against the Bill is that it is a means by which the townies seek to impose their way on country folk and that the country folk are upset about that because they are united in supporting hunting. The evidence shows the contrary. In many of my visits to the countryside, I have found that the vast majority of the population regard the whole hunting business as basically offensive and wrong. If hon. Members doubt that, they should look at all the opinion polls, including a recent opinion poll in Exmoor which is a great centre of hunting. The poll showed that fewer than one fifth of the population there considered that hunting was acceptable.

It has been said that some people see the Bill as a class business in which the upper class is being attacked by left-wing elements. Again, the opinion polls tell us clearly that more than two thirds of all Conservative voters are opposed to fox hunting and want it to be banned.

The misleading impression is given that hunting makes a significant contribution to the control of foxes. Again, the figures are clear. The contribution made by fox hunting is so insignificant that if it disappeared tomorrow no one would notice. Only about 2·5 per cent. of foxes killed in a season are killed by fox hunting, which shows how insignificant hunting is.

The most worrying group are those who suggest that hunting is part of the natural world of the countryside. We know that that is nonsense. The hounds have to be specially trained to go on the hunt because it is not part of their natural instincts. It has to be done through the appalling and grotesque procedure that is called cubbing, which I have observed. A group of young hounds are brought to a small group of trees where it is known that there is a family of young foxes. The hounds are then set to work, to try to encourage them to become involved in the business of fox hunting. In other words, it is not natural for hounds in any way.

The idea that there is a quick kill and that there is no question of any cruelty is absolute rubbish. I think that most hon. Members appreciate that. The principle of hunting—especially in Exmoor, where deer are hunted as well as foxes—involves a situation in which there is the choice to extend the length of the hunt for the ponderous, slow hounds. It is not a matter of setting off a greyhound, when the hunt is over quickly—in a flash—and the fox is killed. Instead, there is a deliberate extension of the hunt, obviously for the purposes of entertainment and relaxation. Why should we say that it is not cruel when the principle of the hunt is deliberate and specific cruelty as a result of extending it? The hunt for a deer can be as long as 20 miles.

We know that a fox tends to run extremely quickly but will be overtaken by the hounds over a long period. The hunt is deliberately prolonged and there is deliberate cruelty. There is the idea that the hounds come along and simply go pop, as it were, and that is the end of the fox. That is nonsensical. We know that almost every organisation that is committed to hunting in Britain has a group of terrier men. If, as often happens, the fox goes underground, they get to work their little terriers. For more than an hour there can be the most grotesque cruelty. The fox is eventually dug up and it is often shot or hit with a stave. In some instances—I am sure that this is not with

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

the approval of the master of the foxhounds—the fox is thrown alive to the dogs. I say in all sincerity that I have received some appalling hate mail over this issue. The one person whom I exempt is the splendid Captain Wallace, who is the head of the master of foxhounds organisation. He has replied to my letters with great courtesy and respect, although he disagrees with me strongly.

We must ask ourselves what the Bill is about. Basically, it is nothing to do with the control of foxes. The argument used to be advanced that poor chickens were torn to bits by ghastly foxes. That argument is now irrelevant because most poor chickens are now contained in ghastly cages as part of factory farming. The chickens can hardly turn round in the cages. Then there are the little lambs. All the scientific evidence and all the studies by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Scottish Office and the universitites have shown that where lambs are taken they are usually dead or particularly weak ones which are about to die in any event. Even if I were wrong and the Ministry and the universities were wrong, the hunts do not constitute an attempt to wipe out the foxes who go for dear little lambs. Indeed, the hunts say that they want to keep a balanced population of foxes, so they do not have the protection that could be provided.

My feeling is that there is no point in denying that fox hunting is a deliberately cruel sport. It is designed to involve great cruelty by extending the long period of a hunt. There is no point in trying to argue that there is a social purpose in fox hunting. The contribution made by fox hunters to the control of the fox population is so insignificant that it does not really matter at all.

What about the slippery slope argument? Is there a danger that if fox hunting is made unlawful we shall move on to make everything else unlawful? I am sure that there are many who want to do lots of new things. For example, I should like to go much further in controlling factory farming, which in my view is the most cruel activity that one could have. Other Members may want to do many other things. Whether we want to go further or to stay where we are, we cannot run away from the fact that we are faced with a specific proposition that we must consider. I suggest that on the basis of logic and real arguments there is no case for fox hunting. We have the continuation of a practice of deliberate and grotesque cruelty. It should be banned and I hope that we shall start on that process today.

12.34 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) does not lose his membership of the Monday club. The club would be the poorer without him.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on bringing forward the measure, and on having the courage to do so. He has given the House an opportunity to debate an issue that may well feature in the Labour party's general election manifesto, unless it is prepared to have second thoughts about that. I refer to its commitment to end hunting.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North did well in moving the Bill's Second Reading. I think that his performance—he is a Labour Front-Bench spokesman—will have been heard with great interest by the 5 million or so active field sportsmen in the country. On average, there are 7,000 per constituency. I have no doubt that they will be redoubling their efforts to ensure that a Labour Government are not elected.

The hon. Gentleman could not have timed this measure better. He spent a great deal of his speech explaining what was not in the Bill. Perhaps I could address my remarks to some of the remarks that he made. I declare an interest not only as a countryman and a field sportsman but as chairman of the Council for Country Sports, which is the umbrella beneath which some 52 organisations representing field sportsmen and women unite to defend their freedom to participate in field sports. They range from horsemen to falconers and from coarse fishermen to pigeon shooters. They campaign together and their slogan, like that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, is that an attack on one is perceived as an attack on all. All field sports seem to be under attack by the provisions of the Bill, which is no more than a trailblazer for the legislation that we might see from a Labour Government.

Therefore, if Labour Members want to improve their chances of winning the general election, they have the time, with their manifesto not yet off to the printers, to remove any commitment to attack field sports. I hope and believe that many of them will have second thoughts and take the party politics out of field sports.

The Bill's long title says that it makes

"provision for the protection of wild mammals from cruelty; and for connected purposes."

The Bill's aims are not based on compassion or conservation. Its main intention is simply to end hunting with hounds. The Bill is disguised as an animal welfare measure, but, if enacted, it would give protection to pests and do incalculable damage to other wildlife and to the countryside.

Hon. Members cannot claim—although many have attempted to do so—that shooting is unaffected by the Bill. Certainly, the new clause that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North mentioned would not be worth much more than the paper that it is not yet written on, to judge by what he said about it.

The *Shooting Times and Country Magazine* described as "baloney" the claim that the Bill is an animal welfare measure. The editor said that the Bill revealed the Labour party as the enemy of hunting, shooting and honesty. That is strong stuff, but perhaps it has some consistency with the survey of the views of Members of Parliament on country sports, which was carried out by *The Field* magazine last December. It showed that almost 50 per cent. of Labour Members who gave their view said that they would support a ban on shooting.

I am sure that hon. Members will also have seen reports in this month's newspapers that the Hunt Saboteurs Association has said that it would target fishing and shooting next if hunting with hounds was banned. Mr. Ponton, its national spokesman, said that the progression was inevitable. He said:

"We are starting a fundamental shift in orientation to take in shooting and fishing, particularly shooting."

His views were echoed by Mr. Eric Staples, the national fund raising co-ordinator of the HSA, who said that

"once hunting was banned it would move on to shooting and fishing.

It is clear that not only hunting and shooting but angling is threatened by the Bill. The League Against Cruel Sports has said that it, too, would campaign against angling. It has said that, although as yet it has no policy on angling, the league will look at it in the near future. It believes that fish feel pain and, therefore, that fishing for entertainment inflicts unnecessary suffering on other living creatures. That exposes the hypocrisy of the Bill.

The Campaign for the Abolition of Angling has already promoted direct action against anglers with its national anti-angling day. There have been physical attacks on anglers and angling shops. We do not want to see such action. It is the action of people who have lost the argument on hunting being extended to other field sports.

There is even a political threat to angling. I give one example. Labour-controlled Plymouth city council has attempted to adopt an animal rights charter to include a ban on angling on council land. Yet the Labour party claims that it is not opposed to angling. Under pressure from the "Right to Roam" lobby, which the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) mentioned, Labour has agreed to give a right of public access to foreshores, rivers and canals together with their banks. Nothing could be more damaging to fishing. I remind the House that, in a recent poll conducted among hon. Members, nearly one third of Labour Members replied that they were merely neutral on the issue of angling, whereas hon. Members from other parties overwhelmingly supported the sport.

I received a letter from the National Federation of Sea Anglers, which says:

> "We feel that if the 'Anti Brigade' manage to force this through the 'House', their next target will no doubt be the 'Fishing Fraternity'."

The federation asks us to oppose the Bill with vim and vigour, and that is what I am doing my best to do.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can it be made clear that the Bill deals with specific matters and that there is no suggestion in it that we are attempting to ban the hunting of sea fish by dogs?

Madam Deputy Speaker: As was made clear earlier by the occupant of the Chair, a wide debate is allowed on Second Reading. The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) is taking up the time allowed to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who has the Floor.

Mr. Colvin: Thank you for that defence, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Much has been said about the effect that a ban on hunting would have on employment. I do not want to rehearse the arguments about that, other than to say that all field sports create jobs and trade and contribute significantly to the conservation of the landscape and its livelihood. There has been some debate about the figures. According to a letter from the British Equestrian Trade Association,

> "Hunting contributes 16,500 jobs and £148 million of turnover to the British economy".

That is a significant amount.

There has been some discussion today about the Scott Henderson report, which—I know—was written a long time ago, in 1951. Giving evidence on the Scott Henderson report, the RSPCA said that, although it could not approve ethically of any form of hunting—that is written into the society's constitution—it regarded fox hunting as an effective and traditional method of control and felt that, if hunting were abolished, greater cruelty would be caused to foxes by the more widespread use of other methods. That is the nub of the argument today.

That was the view expressed by the majority of members of the RSPCA at the time, although I know that others—a minority—wanted hunting prohibited. That is typical of the division of opinion among people who are genuinely concerned with the welfare of animals. Since then, through what is now described as entryism, the RSPCA has been taken over by people who seem to be more interested in politics than in the welfare of the animals for whose welfare they are constitutionally obliged to campaign.

It became clear to the authors of the Scott Henderson report, as long ago as 1951, that the opposition of some people to fox hunting is based on considerations other than cruelty. Some of the evidence that was submitted to that committee left it in no doubt that there were many who objected to fox hunting only because of the widely held misconception that it existed solely for the pleasure of wealthy people. In the view of the authors of the report, that was quite untrue and I can tell the House that it remains untrue today.

We are debating not only cruelty to animals but the rights and freedoms of individuals. In criticising Scott Henderson, hon. Members should take account of what the then Labour Minister said——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman's time is up.

12.43 pm

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): First, I declare my interest as a vice-president of the League Against Cruel Sports. I have received about 300 postcards from my constituents. I regret that a number of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), should have attempted to smear the League Against Cruel Sports as a result of one —or perhaps half a dozen—isolated forgeries. I checked every card that I received to find out whether its sender was on the electoral register. I have answered each one. No one has responded in any way other than to say that he or she sent those cards. It is disgraceful to take an individual case, or a handful of them, in an attempt to smear an organisation such as that.

Mr. Michael Brown: All I can say to my hon. Friend is that I had a letter from a constituent who said that he was appalled that I had sent him an unsolicited letter. I agree that all the cards I have received came from people on the electoral register. However, I must point out to my hon. Friend that if somebody has taken the trouble to forge a card for one of my constituents, it is more than probable that many other cards were similarly forged.

Mr. Bowden: I accept my hon. Friend's withdrawal of his attack on the League Against Cruel Sports. What one individual does is an entirely different matter. The league did not need to forge cards; it sent out thousands and thousands because the vast majority of the people of this country are against hunting.

There is another aspect to this smear campaign. Many hon. Members will have received a letter from the Campaign Against Animal Rights Terrorism.

Sir Teddy Taylor: What is the address?

Mr. Bowden: There is no address on it.

The letter says:

"The Campaign Against Animal Rights Terrorism is calling for a number of animal rights groups to be proscribed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act."

It lumps the League Against Cruel Sports with organisations such as the Hunt Saboteurs Association and the Animal Liberation Front. No hon. Member on either side of the House—there are patrons and vice-presidents of the league on both sides—would be associated with an organisation that indulged in illegal or criminal activities. That anyone should use any such argument to undermine or attack the league is disgraceful.

It never ceases to amaze me that the pro-hunting lobby continually repeats that fox hunting is needed to control the number of foxes. We know that there are at least 300,000, and probably up to 500,000 foxes in this country. The hunts themselves admit that on average they kill only between 12,000 and 13,000 a year. We know that the fox population would continue to breed and exist if there were up to 70 per cent. culling of foxes in any given year, so hunting in the context of the control of foxes is completely irrelevant. It is not true to say that it controls the number —it does not control the number.

Let us not forget that all measures that go on to the statute book—this is why fishing and shooting are irrelevant—have to be approved by the House. To say that because we pass one Bill we automatically pass another Bill to do something else is a futile argument. In its wisdom, Parliament decided, rightly, to ban the digging for and the baiting of badgers. To dig out a badger and to smash in its head with a spade was legal not so long ago. Why on earth, therefore, cannot we accept the argument that it should be as totally revolting and disgusting to do the same to a fox? That is what is happening, however, throughout the country.

I have great respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body). I listen carefully to his comments on animal welfare. He has a proven track record and he has made a strong case regarding shooting. I have referred to the irrelevance of hunting the fox and he has talked about the dangers of shooting. Ought not we to examine whether there is a strong case for leaving the fox alone completely? Let nature take its course. The fox will breed only where there is food. Where there is a shortage of rabbits, rats and other vermin, foxes will disappear in great numbers. We know that hunting will not control the fox. We also know that there are great difficulties when it comes to shooting the fox.

The objective of hunting foxes with hounds is not conservation; it is not to control numbers; it is not a quick chase and a swift kill. The objective is to provide a cheap thrill for sadistic entertainment. Hunting with hounds is an organised, deliberate and calculated act of cruelty. Like cock fighting, bear baiting, dog fighting and badger baiting, it will soon be condemned to the dustbin of history.

12.50 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): There has been a tendency in this debate to strike an abstract ring, almost as though the natural environment—nature itself—does not exist now as it has done over the centuries. My hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) brought some reality into the picture of the environment that we are discussing.

I am against the Bill because I believe that it is right and natural for man to hunt, just as it is for animals to hunt and as has been the practice over the centuries. To disrupt nature and our traditional way of controlling the environment would upset nature's natural balance.

Much has been said about shooting foxes. It is not an easy business. People should remember that one does not simply go out and shoot a fox to control the numbers. Foxes have to be found and dispatched swiftly and without accident. Controlling foxes by shooting raises the question whether they are shot and killed stone dead. What my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston said about foxes suffering from gangrene after a missed shot shows that it is every bit as cruel and painful as hunting those foxes.

Much has also been said about hedgehogs, and I would not disagree with clause 1. Indeed, if this were a one-clause Bill, it would have unanimous support. I wish that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) had dealt with that aspect of cruelty only, rather than widening it to encompass all hunting.

Hunting is not necessarily about killing the fox or the hare—it is the chase which is so important. That is what it is all about, and that is where man's instincts come into play. The cruelty that a cat imposes on a mouse is every bit as bad. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North may well try to ban "Tom and Jerry" cartoon films, which show far greater cruelty. That is the next stage of the logic being propounded in the debate.

There has been reference to jobs. It is important to recognise that many people living in the countryside love the environment and want to protect it, and it is their job to do just that. It could be trimming the hedges, being a gamekeeper, providing the weapons or the clothing or tending to the horses or the dogs that make up the whole panoply of the hunt. That involves a great number of people. We can speculate about the number of jobs at risk, but there will certainly be many.

This is not a matter of Labour against Conservative. Those who follow and participate in the hunts come from all walks of life. There is an underlying sense in the anti-hunting lobby that wants an end to the sport because those people believe that a class element is involved. That cannot be denied. I know that there will be hon. Members in the Lobby today voting for the Bill because they believe that there is a class element in the sport. I am not a huntsman—I do not hunt—but I have attended coursing meetings and I take an interest in field sports. There is a great mixture of people who enjoy those sports and they come from every walk of life. There is no class element.

The panacea for the debate must be to preserve country life and to allow it to go on as it has done over the centuries. To imagine that we now live in a different world and that we are more civilised even than the Romans is a myth. We must obey the reasonable instinct of mankind and allow the countryside to settle its own scores.

12.54 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): The hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) does not seem to understand that his is the perfect argument for the reintroduction of practices that have been banned for the past 100 years. If his argument is that hunting is a valuable part of the tradition of the countryside, why does not he advocate the reintroduction of otter hunting, badger baiting, cock fighting, dog fighting, bear baiting or bull baiting?

Mr. Robert Banks *rose*——

Mr. Davies: Those are rhetorical questions.

Mr. Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I am afraid that time is tight. The hon. Gentleman has made his speech and I want to make mine.

This morning we have had the strangest debate. My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) has put before the House a simple, practical proposition: that we should extend to wild mammals exactly the same consideration and freedom from ill treatment that we extend to other animals, such as those in our homes, on our farms, in our zoos and even in our abattoirs. All those animals are entitled to freedom from cruelty. The particular anomaly is that in the eyes of the law we cannot be guilty of cruelty to wild animals, and my hon. Friend seeks to redress that anomaly.

All the opposition to the Bill has come from hon. Members who advocate hunting. What is strange is that not one of them has had the guts to stand up and defend the practice of hunting. They talked about the traditions of the countryside and jobs. We had the ludicrous assertion that a million horses would be put down. We had a dishonest speech from the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who said that behind the Bill was a hidden agenda, that it was opposed to shooting and would lead to the extinction of the deep-sea fishing fleet. Those were ludicrous assertions. My hon. Friend has made it absolutely clear that the Bill must be taken at face value. All of us have made it clear that we have no hidden agenda and that the Bill does not affect shooting, fishing, falconry, ferreting or any of the other absurd propositions.

Sir Charles Morrison: Surely what matters is not what the hon. Gentleman says, but what is in the Bill. What is in the Bill would be enormously detrimental to shooting.

Mr. Davies: That is a legal matter. If the hon. Gentleman is genuinely concerned for wildlife, he should support the principle of extending protection from cruelty to wildlife on Second Reading and make it clear that he wishes to seek improvements in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North has said that he will move a new clause to address the hon. Gentleman's concerns. Why will not the hon. Gentleman accept my hon. Friend's guarantee at face value? Why will not he accept my hon. Friend's guarantee to include a new clause that exempts shooting from the Bill's provisions?

Sir Charles Morrison: What about clause 1? The hon. Gentleman must consider clause 1. Counsel's opinion is that clause 1 could be enormously disadvantageous to shooting.

Mr. Davies: I, too, have sought counsel's opinion. The opinion asserts that clause 1 states

"a person wilfully inflicts unnecessary suffering on, or cruelly ill-treats a wild mammal"

and that shooting clearly is not "wilfully" inflicting cruelty. The act of shooting is designed to kill an animal.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, let me deal with this point.

I concede that if an individual attempts to shoot a mammal or even a bird—the Bill refers only to mammals—with a weapon or even at a distance that is inappropriate for the target, clearly, it is an act of cruelty and the individual should be brought to book. The Bill and the guarantee given by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North should be enough to satisfy people of good intent. However, the hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) and his friends are not men of good intent. They wish to defeat the Bill because they wish to defend the practice of hunting, but they do not have the guts to stand up and do that.

We have heard the absurd proposition that the Bill should be a matter of conscience. Have we ever heard anything so ridiculous? Do we say it is a matter of conscience if a farmer ill treats dairy cattle, his pigs or his lambs or whether a householder feeds his cat or dog? Of course we do not. We live in a civilised society and we have standards that we expect everyone to comply with. The hon. Gentleman and his friends want to exclude wild animals for the benefit of their entertainment, but they do not have the guts to tell us that.

On the matter of conscience, last July we saw members of Quorn hunt exercise that by deliberately defying their own codes of practice by digging up a fox and releasing it to a pack of hounds. Members of that hunt did not protest and exercise their conscience. It was not until the action of the Quorn hunt was exposed that the master of the hunt was forced to resign. What happened then? A new master was appointed, but he was sacked in a ballot last month because he insisted on enforcing the rules of the hunt.

Sir Charles Morrison *indicated assent.*

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman is nodding because he does not want the rules enforced. So much for leaving these matters to the conscience of individuals.

There is a good defence of hunting, but it has not been expressed in the debate. Hunting is a good day out and people hunt because they like to dress up, appear well attired, be with their friends, get on their horses and gallop around the countryside early in the morning. Why do the defenders of hunting not say that? I do not believe that they are deliberately cruel or full of malevolent intent. The charge against them is that they are indifferent to the suffering that they cause. They set off in the morning, either on Saturday, Tuesday or Thursday, for their entertainment and to gallop across the countryside, but they do not need a live quarry in front of them to enjoy that. The fox, for this purpose, is a dispensable animal and they are indifferent to the suffering that they cause. Why do the supporters of hunting not give us their defence?

The Masters of Foxhounds Association sent a letter to all of my hon. Friends. It states:

"Rule 1 of The Masters of Foxhounds Association states: 'Foxhunting as a sport is the hunting of the fox in his wild and natural state with a pack of Hounds'."

The association asserts that that sport is a natural sport. Is it a sport for 50, 100 or 150 riders on horses with 15 to 20 couples of hounds to go to a wood, beat the sides of their horses to make the fox stay in and to send in the hounds to chase it round and round that wood with no possibility of escape? Is that a sport? Is that hunting the fox in its natural state?

What happens if the fox manages to get away and breaks across the country to find refuge? Out comes the

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terrier man whose first objective is to flush the fox out. Is that hunting the fox in its natural state? When that fox makes its first escape from the hounds and riders, it is forced out again. If that fox will not bolt, it is left underground to fight the terriers. Is that hunting the fox in its natural state?

If the terriers cannot drag the fox out, what happens then? The men with spades come along, dig it out and bash it over the head with their spades, or shoot it or just throw it to the hounds, as the Quorn hunt did. That is what the Master of Foxhounds Association describes as the sport of "hunting the fox in his wild and natural state."

All those people with horses, hounds and men with terriers and spades, accompanied by Land-Rovers, are said to be indulging in a sport. I do not think it is much of a sport.

Those who oppose the Bill talk mostly about foxes. They do not even attempt to justify stag hunting, hare coursing or hunting hares with harriers or beagles. They assert that the fox is a predator. Some of us have been accused of attributing human characteristics to animals, and the fox has been referred to as a cruel and barbaric murderer. Do those who advance that argument really believe that a fox wakes up in the morning full of ill-intent and says, "I could murder someone today"?

The fox is, of course, a predator. It engages in its natural pattern of behaviour when it goes out gathering its fill of earthworms, beetles and fallen fruit, because that is its staple diet. If it comes across a nesting ground bird or a hare or rabbit, it will take it, and in the spring it will take a weak and sometimes even a strong lamb. But nobody has explained how fox hunting is an appropriate response to that problem. If one must deal with the problem by controlling the fox, an individual fox, not the total fox population, must be controlled.

When the hunters go out in the morning, they do not say, "We must get that one fox that last night was after farmer Jones's lambs" or "We must get that fox that is preying on poultry." They chase the first fox that they come across. Nobody has suggested that that is an effective means of dealing with a predator.

All who know about these issues are aware that if one wants to protect animals, birds or poultry from predation, it can be done in one or two ways. Either the individual predator must be shot at the point of its attack—that is recognised in the guidelines issued by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation—or by lamping.

The hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) hit the target when he referred to his experience with poultry. If he lives in an area where there are foxes and he leaves his hen house open during the night, the fox will, of course, go in. What does he think will happen? If he is worried about his poultry, he should make arrangements to have the door locked at night. That is what I do, and only once—it happened in the middle of the last general election campaign—I left the door of my poultry house open, and the fox got in and killed all my chickens.

Mr. Tony Banks: Or was it a Tory canvasser?

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend asks a good question.

I make sure that my poultry house is locked. Every night the fox comes round. I could stay up every night and shoot whatever fox comes visiting. I could shoot one tonight and another tomorrow night. That could go on all week, and foxes would still be visiting my hen house. We have a resident fox population. Kill one, and another is waiting to fill that predator's space.

The hon. Member for Holland with Boston also talked about mink. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had a problem with a pest in his constituency—the coypu—and the Ministry wanted to exterminate them because they were burrowing into the canal banks. The Ministry did not start coypu hunting or obtain some coypu hounds. It ordered a proper scientific evaluation of the problem, set traps and monitored the situation. Scientists were employed to deal with the problem, and the coypu were wiped out.

If the hon. Gentleman is also worried about mink, he will be aware that every trout farmer and person with river interests trap mink, which are vulnerable to live trapping—

Sir Richard Body *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Davies: —and if the hon. Gentleman disbelieves me, I will tell him how it is done.

Sir Richard Body: I appreciate what can be done by trapping. I see many mink traps and I think that is much more cruel to keep a mink in such a trap. Often, those traps are set and not looked at again for two or three days. That is extremely cruel—much more cruel than the method that I suggested.

Mr. Davies: In that case, the hon. Gentleman is being highly irresponsible. He is either setting traps—

Sir Richard Body: I do not set them.

Mr. Davies: May I finish my point? If the hon. Gentleman is setting traps, he should exercise responsibility and visit them regularly. If he refers to other people setting traps, he should take it upon himself to ensure that those traps are properly inspected by referring them to the appropriate authorities. I am surprised that, with his long-standing record of support for animal welfare, the hon. Gentleman is so casual in his defence of the welfare conditions of mink.

The Bill makes full provision for that in clause 8(1)(a), which allows for the proper licensing of the control of pests or predators where necessary.

Earlier in the debate, I intervened on the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), who spoke about the problem of lambs. The hon. Members for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) assert that fox hunting is necessary to control the fox population because foxes kill nesting game birds such as partridge, pheasant and grouse. They are correct to say that foxes will take game birds and eggs. But why is there a closed season on fox hunting at the very time when those game birds are nesting? The problem exists in May and June, when foxes are not hunted. It is not a clever response to say, "All those foxes are killing our partridges, but never mind, we shall wait until October before we hunt them." Do they seriously believe that that is an acceptable argument? They then say that fox hunting is the best way to kill those predators.

The hon. Members for Romsey and Waterside and for Devizes support snaring because that is what they do.

They do not hunt foxes in May and June because that is when they put down snares. Their real interest is shooting game birds, which is why they want snaring.

Mr. Paice: Is the hon. Gentleman honestly advocating that foxes should be controlled during their natural breeding season? It is traditional that any animal—pest or otherwise—are not hunted then. I do not refer simply to hunting. It would be wrong to shoot a vixen in April or May, or kill her in any other way, when a litter of cubs may be left in a hole to suffer from starvation. That cannot be what the hon. Gentleman is recommending.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman understands neither his brief nor the biology of the fox. Hunts go out during the very season when the vixen are whelped. They hunt in February, when the vixen has her cubs underground. The consequences are twofold: either the hunt will kill a vixen, leaving the cubs to die underground, or the hunt will kill a dog fox if it is above ground and he will be unable to provide for the vixen. The hon. Gentleman must understand that the current practice of hunting in February and March results in that happening.

It has been asserted that hunting controls the fox population. All the scientific evidence available from universities, academic studies, field research and the examination of other predators that are top of their food chain shows beyond doubt that the factors that control the fox population are not predation from above but the ability of the habitat to sustain that population. It depends on whether there is sufficient habitat for individual animals to control and defend an adequate food supply to sustain them. If one tries to control the total fox population by culling, whether by hunting, snaring or shooting, one simply encourages foxes to breed more rapidly. Instead of our having a smaller fox population, we will simply have a younger one, because the young vixens will breed more. We should encourage research being done at the universities of Aberdeen, Oxford and Bristol to determine the impact of the culling of foxes. I think that if it were not done, there would be fewer foxes. There would be an older fox population, and fewer vixens would breed. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) is laughing, but if he spoke to the farmers in his constituency, he would know that that is the case. Older vixens would breed less; they would have fewer litters. The population would come into equilibrium with the habitat. All the scientific evidence demonstrates that.

The Bill establishes that individuals cannot be cruel to wild animals—a principle which no one can dispute. If it applies to captive and domestic animals, surely it must apply to wild animals. The hunting lobby opposes that principle. We should support the Bill, in defiance of the hunting lobby, for three reasons. The first is that the act of hunting is cruel and unnecessary. Secondly, if we accept the Bill we shall start a new chapter; we shall start to rewrite our relationship with animals, saying that although we use them, we must do so with respect.

The third reason is that this country has no international moral authority when it negotiates on matters of animal welfare. That is why the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food could not get his way in Iceland when he opposed the culling of whales. The Icelanders said, "Do not tell us how to cull whales humanely. At least we eat the whales that we kill. You practise fox hunting for fun."

In the Council of Ministers, we cannot oppose the French practice of culling birds, or the Spaniards' of bull fighting and the other blood festivals. We must accept that there is now a European and international dimension. If we want to hold our heads up high in the councils of the world we must put our own house in order.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you received any requests for a statement on today's sharp fall in the inflation figure? The Secretary of State for Employment should be brought to the House——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I have received no such request.

1.17 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): I begin by offering my congatulations to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on his good fortune in securing the debate today. We have had the opportunity for a full day's debate on an important matter, and we have debated it with passion, but also with good humour. The matter was last debated and voted on in 1949—that may be something of a record.

The Bill's title describes it as a measure to provide protection for wild mammals. The Government have already given considerable priority to that aspect of the law, and I hope that the House will bear with me if I give a few details of what we have achieved. I hope that hon. Members will agree that it amounts to an impressive list of useful and effective measures.

We have put the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 on to the statute book. It established for the first time in this country a comprehensive framework protecting species and their habitats. I shall give the House three examples of the substantial advances that the Act has brought about.

First, it protects 116 species of animals, including all our endangered mammals. Creatures such as the red squirrel, the otter and 15 species of bats found in Great Britain are now protected against killing, injuring and disturbance. We keep the list of species under regular review with our scientific advisers, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Secondly, the Act banned the use of the self-locking snare on any wild animal and protected a number of particular species, such as the badger and the red squirrel, from trapping and snaring in general. The United Kingdom is also acting against cruel trapping methods abroad. We were in the forefront in pressing for the EC regulation on the importation of certain furs. That regulation was adopted last November and will prohibit the use of the leg-hold trap, which has already been banned in this country for more than 30 years.

Thirdly, the 1981 Act gives special protection to birds. The Act made it an offence to kill or take wild birds, damage their nests or take or destroy their eggs. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 was also tightened up last year by making it an offence to cause or permit another person to contravene those provisions of the Act which prohibit the use of cruel or indiscriminate methods of killing or taking wild birds or protected species. This will help to bring home to people who use or permit the use of illegal methods to kill wildlife that we are determined to

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do everything possible to meet our objectives for the protection of our natural heritage, and especially our endangered species.

Clearly, the provision of protection for animals which are pests in the countryside motivates the Bill. However, pests are already subject to the law. It is a testimony to the British concern for animals that our pests, as well as our pets, are covered by the law. I should say to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Dame J. Fookes) that some areas are probably not yet protected.

Quite apart from the Wildlife and Countryside Act, there is legislation governing the use of chemical products and spring traps to control pests. Before they can be approved for sale, products classified as pesticides undergo a thorough evaluation. This includes an assessment of whether the product is humane in its action. Similar criteria apply to the testing of spring traps, which must be approved by order in the House.

I am a little disappointed by the Bill's provisions. The Bill is very wide ranging, in that it seeks to provide protection for any wild mammal and to protect them from a number of activities. It is obvious that the Bill is designed to provide the greatest possible protection to the greatest number of wild mammals. However, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, especially at the start of his speech, made no secret of the fact that one of the principal aims of the Bill is the prevention of fox hunting and other field sports. As the hon. Gentleman knows, that central tenet is bound to be contradicted by those who see field sports as a proper and necessary part of maintaining the balance of nature. We have heard many such arguments in the debate. Nevertheless, this is the issue of principle at the heart of the debate.

My personal view is that a simple Bill that tackled the issue of field sports on its own would have been a better way of achieving the purpose. We could then have had a debate that concentrated entirely on the issue of principle. As it is, the other provisions in the Bill will complicate today's debate and the consideration of the field sports question. It is, after all, the issue of principle which really interests the public.

All hon. Members who have spoken and many others have reported full postbags on the central issue. The Bill's supporters claim that a substantial majority of the public are in favour of banning fox hunting. My straw poll on Wednesday among my Home Office colleagues, who represent a fairly good cross-section of constituencies, suggested that the division is nearer half and half. I share hon. Members' scepticism about the results of ordinary and straw polls.

Mr. Colvin: My right hon. Friend speaks about the results of straw polls, which were mentioned by some hon. Members. A recent straw poll in the New Forest showed that a majority of people were in favour of a ban on hunting. On that result, the local Liberal Democrat council decided to pass a resolution calling on me to support such a ban. However, that straw poll was not consistent with a previous one which showed that 97 per cent. of New Forest people were in favour of hunting. Those who carry out straw polls probably get the results that they seek.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am not sure whether I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that, as I carried out a straw poll among my Home Office colleagues.

I must tell the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North that the Government have considerable reservations about the effect of the Bill both on farmers and on rural communities as a whole. The Bill would impose onerous obligations on everyone in rural communities, making it extremely difficult to control agricultural pests effectively. The licensing system in the Bill is the problem. I was glad to note that, when the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North introdued the Bill he pointed to the possibility of reconsidering those provisions.

I will explain our fears about what would happen in practice once a farmer had applied for a licence and it may become clear to the House why we have such concerns. The Bill provides only for the issue of licences to prevent serious damage, but licensing should be limited in application. Each application received would require an assessment of whether serious damage was occurring, probably involving site visits, as well as a decision about whether a particular type of control might cause unnecessary suffering. The likely number of such applications would mean a massive work load for those involved in the proposed licensing authorities, with huge resource implications. At the same time, normal agricultural practices would be severely disrupted. I really am concerned about the effect that the increased bureaucracy would have on the farmer, whom many would consider to be quite burdened enough already, with rules and regulations to follow and forms to fill in.

The need for the farmer to protect his crops and livestock, and thus his livelihood, from pests is crucial and I fear that the Bill does not quite recognise that. This point is partly in reply to the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). Let us suppose that, quite unexpectedly, a farmer's lambs or chickens are attacked by a fox. The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), in an excellent contribution to the debate, told us that that happens. What does the law-abiding farmer do? It is clear that the Bill would require him to put in for a licence to deal with any repetition of the situation by shooting or by some other method. How long would it take for that licence to come through? [HON. MEMBERS: "Years."] As I have already said—and as hon. Members have just pointed out—the men from the Ministry would have to visit to assess the seriousness of the damage to crops, land and poultry. They would then make a recommendation.

Mr. McNamara: I do not think that the right hon. Lady wants to mislead the House. If a farmer were presented with the difficulty to which she refers, clause 5 would apply. It says:

> "A person shall not be guilty of an offence under section 2 above if he shows
>
> (a) that his action was necessary for the immediate protection of any domestic or captive animal which was being attacked by a wild animal; and
>
> (b) that he was the owner . . . or was acting"

on his behalf.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that point. I am addressing the central point of the Bill, which is that one expects licences to be gained by people who wish to protect their property.

Mr. Robert Banks: My right hon. Friend has spoken about the cost of the licensing system if the Bill were enacted. Does she agree that the cost would bear as heavily on urban dwellers as on those who live in the countryside and who benefit from the control of vermin?

Mrs. Rumbold: Exactly that effect would be felt, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I fear that Labour Members do not quite understand the extent to which licensing could cause a considerable problem. The man from the Ministry would have to make a recommendation and someone else would have to agree it. Eventually, there would have to be a licence in the post. However much one does not want to recognise that for the purposes of the Bill, in reality that is the way in which large bureaucracies work.

I fear that it will be too late for many farmers. Of course licensing systems can work quickly, but the scale of operation proposed in the Bill would be massive. Staff and money would be required to provide the standard of service that would be needed. If the public are expected to foot the Bill, we wonder whether that would be acceptable to them. We wonder also whether it would have to be yet another burden for the farmers to undertake. In reality, the farmer would choose to protect his livestock by whatever method he favoured before his licence arrived. That is something that he would have to justify, but, as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North has said, he would clearly be able to do so.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My right hon. Friend said at the beginning of her speech that it is a long time since the House debated the principle of the subject now under discussion. I believe that there has not been an objective inquiry into these matters since the late 1940s. As it is clear from our constituency mail and from the debate that there is a wide variation of interpretation of the factual evidence, does my right hon. Friend see any merit in establishing an objective inquiry so that those who wish to proceed may do so on the basis of agreed evidence?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am interested in the notion that my hon. Friend puts forward. For the purposes of the Bill, however, several arguments have been advanced extremely clearly. I think that a high percentage of hon. Members understand the issues that we are debating.

The problem that I have outlined would go beyond the countryside. The Bill would have implications for the statutory control of rats in urban area, for example. I make that point only to show that the comprehensiveness of the Bill means that it strays away from the hunt into areas which I believe would better have been avoided. These are not just technical points. The licensing system underpins the whole of the Bill and amounts to a serious flaw.

Many of the arguments advanced on the question of hunting today were similarly advanced during the debate in 1949, although inevitably there have been changes in attitudes since then. Perhaps one of the more regrettable changes is that the issue tends these days not to be the subject of clear and well-argued debate alone. There are protests and demonstrations, some of which are far from peaceful, instead of rational and reasoned argument of the sort that we have had today.

I cannot help feeling that there is an irony, and one which my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) will enjoy. The Minister who replied to the 1949 debate was the then Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, who expressed his hope that the party that he represented, which I think was the same party as that which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North now represents, would not go down in history as the party that was anxious to abolish the pleasures of others. That was one of the many reasons which he adduced in support of the then Government's decision to oppose the then Bill.

As hon. Members are well aware, the Government have consistently adopted a position of neutrality towards all legislation which touches on field sports. We take the view that participation in field sports is a matter of individual conscience. The Government will maintain this tradition of neutrality today. As I have said, however, much of the Bill—the licensing provisions and the implications for the control of pests—has little to do with the central issue. I must tell the House that if the Bill reaches Committee the Government will have to oppose those aspects.

While the Government remain neutral—I shall not vote one way or the other today—we nevertheless think it right that all those Members who wish to express a view one way or another on Second Reading, including members of the Government, should be perfectly free to do so.

1.33 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Either the Minister's heart was not in the speech that she just made or she has accidentally made a compelling case for giving the Bill a Second Reading. If that was the best argument that the Government could put up against the Bill of my good and hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), I hope that the Bill will not only receive a Second Reading but do so by a huge majority.

I especially congratulate my good and hon. Friend because this is one of the rare occasions when we are invited to do something which has the clear and overwhelming support of electors in both town and country: 80 out of every 100 people polled, not in a straw poll but in a national opinion poll in November 1991, said that they disapproved of fox hunting. Indeed, I can tell Conservative Members that 67 out of every 100 people who say that they intend to vote Conservative at the coming election are also opposed to fox hunting.

Another poll, by NOP, found that 53 in every 100 rural residents disapproved of fox hunting, as against 69 per cent. of urban residents. On stag hunting, 79 per cent. of rural residents disapproved as against 81 per cent. of urban residents. On hare coursing 80 in every 100 disapproved, including 77 in every 100 in rural areas.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tredinnick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbett: So the enthusiasts for blood sports are in a clear minority. It has been argued that the fox is a pest that must be got rid of. But 70 in every 100 farmers say that foxes do not significantly harm their interests, and 36 per cent. say that foxes are useful in controlling rabbits and rodents. Two out of every three farmers say that they suffer no financial loss from fox damage.

Indeed, we know that in areas where there are fox hunts —this has been said in today's debate—great care is taken

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by those who hunt to construct artificial earths and stick heaps for foxes to breed in and to feed and nurture foxes when the weather is hard.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Corbett: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way to me, too.

Mr. George Howarth: Does my hon. Friend agree that a lot has been made of the point that if we vote for the Bill today it will be the thin edge of the wedge for angling? Does he agree that the two things are distinct and separate and that it is possible to support anglers and angling while voting for the Bill today?

Mr. Corbett: I intend to come to that point later. My hon. Friend will be aware that sitting in front of him is my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) who, when he was Minister for Sport and filled that office with such distinction, took the lead in setting up a national angling council to give anglers a unified national voice. My hon. Friend is, of course, right that the Bill has nothing to do with angling or shooting.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbett: In a moment.

If, as the hunters argue, foxes are a vicious pest that must be driven from the face of the countryside, why all the tender loving care towards them? Most hunts know exactly where foxes live in their area and could easily dispatch them by shooting, if they chose to do so. If it is argued that shooting runs the risk of injuring rather than killing the fox, one wonders whether it is appropriate for such bad shots to hold a shotgun or firearms licence as they would appear to be a danger not only to wild animals but to themselves and other sporting shooters.

Mr. Paice: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbett: I wonder why groups of people seek pleasure in the cruel destruction of so much of the wildlife with which we share this planet. It is a shame and a stain on a society which calls itself civilised that the badger has no enemy but man. Despite the law, men still dig up badger setts in a brutal and senseless manner. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is illegal."] Of course it is illegal, but I hope that no one is suggesting that because it is illegal it does not happen. Those of us who have seen badgers at close hand marvel at their beauty and dignity.

Some people—a minority—claim that it is perfectly all right to turn our countryside into the killing fields. There is no justification for any form of hunting with hounds in this day and age—if there ever was—and for such wanton cruelty to wildlife to continue under the name of sport. It is no such thing. It is the organised ritual destruction of wildlife, carried out in fancy dress amid great ceremony by those who pretend that they care for wildlife and its habitats. It degrades and disgraces the name of legitimate sport.

Why cannot those who live in the countryside and those of us who visit it simply enjoy it, marvel at its beauty, rejoice in its variety, find solace in its silence and listen, relax and learn?

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The country will be very interested to hear an official statement from the Labour Front Bench of the party's vitriolic hatred of people who pursue country sports. If the hon. Gentleman's case is that, because the opinion polls show that a large proportion of people are against hunting, the House should act against hunting, may I invite him to join me in the Lobby in support of capital punishment?

Mr. Corbett: No, not at all.

I also wonder what otherwise responsible parents feel they are doing when they encourage children as young as six or seven to see a fox, hare, stag or badger needlessly killed, and in some cases have those children blooded. What effect do they think that that has on a young mind, and what does killing for pleasure do to people who hunt over the years?

I am aware of, and have seen at first hand, the care that estate owners and landowners take with the conservation and protection of the threatened environment in our countryside, but if the price of that is that much of our countryside has to be needlessly soaked with the blood of wild animals, it is too high a price to pay. Those who hunt seem to claim that, in return for looking after the countryside, they should have the unfettered right to slaughter the wild animals that live there. That is a claim without foundation. As citizens privileged to have private access to the land, it is their duty to treat it with respect on behalf of us all and on behalf of future generations, and they should not seek—nor should they have—any privilege in return.

Some argue—although the polls show that it is not the case—that it is just us townies who oppose hunting with hounds. Although I help to represent a great city, I yield to no one in my devotion to, and concern for, the countryside, and I spend as much time as I can in it. To those who live in the countryside, I would also say that the environment is not just theirs—it belongs to each and every one of us.

Ms. Mowlam: Will my hon. Friend clarify the point about our being opposed to the people who go hunting? We have no objection to people who go hunting and we have tried to explain—as the Bill explains—that drag hunting is another option. Apart from the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), no one has come up with a reason why drag hunting is not acceptable, and the hon. Gentleman's explanation is that it is like kissing one's sister. Does my hon. Friend have any view on that?

Mr. Corbett: My hon. Friend is quite right. The Bill is about the protection of wild mammals, not the protection of people.

Those who took part in yesterday's so-called farmers' protest at the Stoneleigh showground in Warwickshire were under close instruction to make themselves look more like a squad from "The Archers" than those engaged in bloodsports. The National Hunt Committee memo instructed:

> "There will be no hounds, no red coats, no top hats, no hunting horns. Banners should be made which state clearly the county you are from eg 'Gloucester farmers say this', 'Warwickshire farmers demand that' etc.".

Why the modesty? If there is nothing to hide, if there is nothing to be ashamed of, why no hounds, why no red coats, why no top hats and why no hunting horns? Are they not all part of the ritual that hunters claim is their birthright? Why was there no bold assertion of that ancient right? The truth is that somewhere behind those who organised yesterday's demonstration was just plain shame —a shame which prevented them from literally demonstrating in their true colours and a shame which stains their sporting claims.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Can the hon. Gentleman explain why a briefing note was sent to all his colleagues who feel as he does suggesting that they should refuse any invitations to go and talk to the hunts or to see how the hunts operate?

Mr. Corbett: I have not seen such a note; I did not get one. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nor did we."] I said earlier that there has been a bid by those who engage in blood sports to turn this into a townie-versus-villager issue. I shall read out a few random cuttings from a number of newspapers which circulate almost exclusively in rural areas. On 6 December 1991 the *West Cumbria Evening News* reported:

> "Cumbrian villagers are up in arms after claiming that fox hunters cause 'mayhem' in the countryside . . . Anne Watson, of Newcroft Kennels, Mawbray, said 'I was appalled at the mayhem they caused.'"

The *Western Daily Press* on 23 December 1991 stated:

> "Angry businessman Joe Hughes yesterday rapped the Beaufort hunt—a favourite of the Royals—after hounds and riders galloped through a field of valuable young ponies . . . huntsmen cut through a padlocked chain to gain access to the private paddock."

I do not doubt that those very same huntsmen would be quick to condemn those who indulge in violence and vandalism at football matches.

The Shropshire Star of 8 December 1991 reported:

> "Residents in a Shropshire village were angered when hounds from a hunt poured into gardens hot on the scent of a fleeing fox . . . the incident upset a number of villagers in Sheriffhales, near Telford."

My favourite newspaper, the *Royston Crow*, on 29 December 1991 reported:

> "A family looked on in horror as a fox was slaughtered in their garden by hounds from the Puckeridge and Thurlow Hunt."

I have here similar reports from around the country and a list as long as my arm going back some years.

No other group of people would be allowed to cause such unfettered mayhem and distress, annoyance and damage. In urban areas the police would rightly have charged them with public order offences before they could say "Tally-ho." We know from the polls that hunting with hounds upsets large numbers of people who live in the countryside. We also know that most people in the countryside are opposed to hunting with hounds. We know, too, that if it is claimed that foxes are such an expensive pest and menace, hunting them with hounds must be the most costly and inefficient method that anyone could possibly devise to deal with them. If the aim is to exercise some form of control, it would be better for the huntsmen to admit that that is a senseless ambition and turn to drag hunting.

I like the comments of Miss J. E. Holland, whose address is Beech Hall, Depden, Suffolk. From the heart of rural England, and from an address which might suggest political persuasion other than Labour, she says:

> "Whatever one's opinions of the morality of cub/fox hunting perhaps these alleged sportspeople should consider how they would feel if, for example, their homes were besieged by football fans with dogs. I can think of no other sport where such unruly and selfish behaviour is considered acceptable."

Neither can I, nor can my right hon. and hon. Friends, and nor can a substantial number of Conservative Members of Parliament.

There have been many comments about the Labour party's attitude towards angling and shooting—and indeed, to its animal welfare and wildlife policy generally. Among those who have questioned that is Jonathan Young, editor of the pro-hunting publication *The Field*. As a responsible editor, he should know that in 1978 the Labour party published a document called "Living Without Cruelty". It was the first major political party to publish such an animal welfare docment. It followed a decision by Labour's national executive committee to seek the abolition of all blood sports. That was reflected in our 1983 election manifesto, which stated:

> "Hare coursing, fox hunting and all forms of hunting with dogs will be made illegal."

In 1987, our election manifesto pledged to

> "end all forms of organised hunting with hounds."

In each of those documents, significant extra words followed those that I have quoted. I shall quote them now to rebut the false allegations made by those who hunt and by others in this House. The 1987 manifesto said that, following the pledge to ban all forms of hunting with hounds:

> "These changes will not affect shooting and fishing."

I ask the House to accept that that is Labour's policy now, that it will be Labour's policy at the coming election, and that it will remain Labour's policy. When silly Jonathan Young of *The Field* asserted in the *Daily Mail* on Tuesday:

> "An attack on one field sport is an attack on all",

he was talking through that part of his body which usually sits upon a saddle. I repeat that Labour has no intention of extending the ban on hunting with dogs to shooting or angling.

The Bill gives the House the opportunity to respond to the public demand. By majority, people in town and countryside want an end to the needless slaughter. I hope that the House will give the Bill a Second Reading on an all-party basis. If it does not, the new Labour Government will introduce a Bill early in that Government's life.

1.52 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I declare my interest —although it is well known to most hon. Members—as chairman of the British Field Sports Society, and I am a farmer—[HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."] I can hear the cries of "Disgraceful" from the Labour Benches. That clearly gives away both the intention behind the Opposition's support of the Bill and what they intend the Bill to accomplish.

Until the speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) we had had a good debate, conducted in a fair and proper manner. The hon. Member for Erdington made one of the worst and most provocative speeches that I have heard in a long time. It was divisive —*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is pleased with himself. He claimed that he was looking for all-party support, but in fact he managed to divide both the parties and the town and countryside communities.

The hon. Gentleman's views, expressed as a representative of Birmingham, were clearly hostile to not only those who participate in field sports in the countryside but those who live and work the countryside. They were hostile to

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those who have the trust—that is the only word that he uttered with which I agree—of maintaining the countryside and improving it for future generations. That is the intention of those who live in the countryside. The consequences of Bills such as this, and the attitude of people like the hon. Member for Erdington, make their job more difficult and make it less likely that the countryside will be maintained for future generations in a way that those of us who live in it and work it try to achieve.

Before the hon. Member for Erdington spoke, we had had an interesting and stimulating debate. Several issues were raised, and I wish to deal with them briefly. The first question is: what lies behind the Bill? It has two purposes. The first is to eliminate cruelty to wildlife. In so far as that is its intention, we on this side of the House and in the British Field Sports Society certainly agree with it. We supported the Badger Bill in the last Session, once it has been put into a state in which it genuinely protected badgers and no longer clandestinely threatened hunting. That was also a hidden agenda in that Bill in its original form.

We would support any legislation that gave added protection to hedgehogs against being maltreated or to any wild animal against being beaten and cruelly ill treated deliberately by people who have no business to do so.

Whether such a law would be effective is another matter. We have legislated on badgers yet, sadly, I read in my papers last week of a revolting attack on badgers during the past two weeks or so, in which one was impaled from head to tail by a stake. Such behaviour is disgusting. No hon. Member and few people in the country, other than the appalling perpetrators, would support it. Unfortunately, however effective we try to make the law, it cannot wholly prevent such activity from taking place. In so far as it does take place, it must be condemned. If an hon. Member introduced legislation to give hedgehogs the protection that has been given to badgers, of course I would support it.

It is, however, not the main purpose of this Bill to give such protection in the countryside. As the hon. Member for Erdington made absolutely clear, the principal thrust of the Bill and the main intention of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and the supporters is undoubtedly to abolish fox hunting. The hon. Member for Erdington made clear his personal commitment to shooting and fishing. I should like to know how he justifies logically an attack on hunting on the ground of cruelty and distinguishes it from an attack on shooting or fishing on the same ground. There is no logical way of claiming that hunting is unnecessarily cruel while in the same breath saying that fishing is not. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) and others have expressed that point well.

In any culling or killing operation, an element of cruelty is undoubtedly involved. That is true in slaughter houses. It is true in particular of the Halal system killing. I think that those of the Jewish faith have that system of slaughter before they are prepared to eat any meat. There are degrees of cruelty in any method of slaughter. It is the job of the House, rightly, to try to eliminate that element of cruelty in both wild and domestic situations. Again, in so far as we are trying to do that, the British Field Sports Society, all my colleagues and I would agree.

The Bill is bad because that is not what it would do. It is picking on fox hunting for all the old, class-divisive reasons behind why the Labour party tried to do this before and it has no justification. It is not true that hunting is an activity that only toffs and very rich people enjoy. It is probably one of the best sports enjoyed by people of all walks of life.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I reinforce completely what my hon. Friend has just said. Indeed, a constituent of mine wrote to me, saying:

> "I am not a toff or a snob but a welder by trade and work in a local factory in a dirty and demanding job. The reason I feel so strongly about this issue it is down to the freedom of choice if I want to go I go, if not I don't go but these people who want the sport banned are telling me I should not go. So much for the freedom of choice."

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Yes, it is about freedom of choice. The author of that letter expresses my precise point well. This sport is enjoyed by people from all walks of life. It is enjoyed by those who live in the town as well as those who live in the country. It has an important conservation role.

The attack on fox hunting is misconceived and politically guided. I find it astonishing that, in the 1990s, the old Labour party and, I am sorry to say, one or two misguided members of my party, are still walking down that precarious path.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Will the hon. Gentleman take the opportunity today to dissociate himself from the activities of the Quorn hunt, as shown on film? Will he also condemn those who control that hunt for their lack of commitment to stop the barbaric actions that were vividly shown on television a few months ago?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I dissociate myself, the British Field Sports Society and the Masters of Foxhounds Association from the misconduct of those running the Quorn hunt on the day in question. That is why disciplinary action was taken against those masters and why the Masters of Foxhounds Association is now reviewing its rules. I hope that it will produce a code of conduct. That is why every step is being taken to ensure that such behaviour is not repeated.

The hon. Gentleman must be aware that every walk of life, even this place, is not populated by saints. In every aspect of human activity some people behave as they should not. The hon. Gentleman, however, asked me to dissociate myself from the specific conduct of the Quorn hunt. I have done so and I will do so on any occasion should it be repeated.

Mr. Budgen: Would my hon. Friend also concede that when that conduct occurred at the Quorn hunt it was dealt with effectively and quickly?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Yes, it was. The disciplinary committee of the Masters of Foxhounds Association reviewed those activities as soon as they were brought to its attention. It took the necessary action as swiftly as possible.

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend should be aware that two votes have been taken in Leicestershire county council on whether hunting should be allowed on county council land. In 1982, the county council narrowly voted by a majority of four to allow such hunting. Another vote was taken after the Quorn incident and a decisive vote of 47 to 34—a majority of 13—found in favour of maintaining hunting on county council land. That suggests that my hon. Friend is winning the argument and it demonstrates to the House of Commons what an elected body in Leicestershire, the centre of hunting, feels about that issue.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: It is true that in Leicestershire and in many other counties this issue has been reviewed recently. In almost every case, the decision has been to continue with hunting across publicly owned land. That is welcome and it gives the lie to the point made by the hon. Member for Erdington about a huge lobby against field sports. Those who live in and have a duty to care for the countryside are, by a huge majority, in support of field sports. Because a large number of people have no knowledge of hunting and are susceptible to the cuddly bear image of the fox, which Beatrix Potter and others have managed to implant in people's minds, they are, on a superficial level, against fox hunting.

I remind hon. Members that we went through all this in the late 1940s. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State reminded us that the then Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Tom Williams, a member of the Labour party, urged hon. Members on both sides of the House to support fox hunting. He tabled a motion in 1925 to abolish it. [AN HON. MEMBER: "That was 40 years ago."] The reasons for supporting fox hunting are as valid now as they were then. In 1949 Mr. Williams argued his case on the issue of cruelty. It is on that issue that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North is asking the House to support his Bill. Mr. Williams said:

> "the promoters of this Bill . . . regard hunting and cruelty as synonymous, thinking that to abolish the hunt is to abolish cruelty. On the contrary, they render rural recreation illegal, and do absolutely nothing towards abolishing or restraining cruelty".—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1949; Vol. 461, c. 2231.]

That is the truth. We have today reviewed extensively the alternative ways in which foxes can be culled, and the only Member in the whole debate to suggest that they should not be culled at all was my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden), who at least followed his argument to its logical conclusion by saying that foxes should not be culled but should be allowed to breed on and on—never mind the farmer, one might say, or the poultry keeper or even the foxes, which might find that there were too many of them for their own health. It was an absurd argument, but at least my hon. Friend carried to a logical conclusion the idea that it is cruel to hunt. It is not. It is more cruel to kill the animals by other means.

Mr. Marland: To add strength to my hon. Friend's argument, he will be interested to know that yet another local authority has voted to allow fox hunting to be carried on across its ground. Gloucestershire county council, having been heavily lobbied by all shades of opinion, has a substantial majority of councillors in favour of allowing fox hunting to continue on council-owned land. It is absolute nonsense to try to persuade us, as Labour Members do, that the majority of people are against fox hunting, when they are clearly not.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. When people consider the merits of the argument and focus on what is involved, they come down on the side of fox hunting.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham) *rose*——

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for not giving way. I do not want to delay the House much longer.

There is no doubt that field sports, taken collectively, have always played an enormous role in the founding of the countryside as we enjoy it today. [*Interruption.*] I see the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North dissenting and, I think, making rude noises at me. That helps to show the ignorance of Labour Members in that they are unable to accept even that elementary point.

On my small farm I have eight pieces of woodland. Four of them were planted by my grandfather, who was chairman of the local hunt, two were planted by my father because he was a keen shot, and I have planted two because I am a keen shot. If we did not have country sports, none of those small areas of woodland would have been planted or would be maintained.

There is a glorious ignorance among Opposition Members about countryside matters. Indeed, the impression was given earlier that the trees were everlasting. Why would people take out woodland if fox hunting were abolished? That is a silly question to ask, because they would not take it out. But they would not renew it, either, and on reaching the end of its natural life, the woodland would not be replaced. Conservation and field sports and conservation and farming are synonymous. Sadly, Labour Members are unaware of that and they are careless about the future of the countryside and those who inhabit it.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Is my hon. Friend aware that a report in *The Shropshire Star* says that 4,000 people are against a ban on fox hunting and only 2,643 are in favour?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Every time an hon. Member intervenes, new facts in favour of the continuance of fox hunting are produced. The argument is clearly being won by the fox-hunting lobby.

One of the saddest aspects of the measure is that unfortunately the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North does not understand what his Bill proposes to do. I say that with sadness because I know that his intention is honest and that he does not wish to mislead the House or the country. Yesterday, in a radio interview by Mr. Chris Stewart, the hon. Gentleman stated that the Bill covered all wilful cruelty to animals. He said that in the first part of his statement and repeated it a little later. The Bill does not mention "wilful" with regard to the cruelty aspect. Clause 1 states:

> "a person wilfully inflicts unnecessary suffering on, or cruelly ill-treats a wild mammal".

The hon. Gentleman has clearly not taken on board the fact that "wilful" refers only to the first half of the sentence. He infers that if the cruelty is inflicted by the nature of an act, as opposed to by someone intending to be cruel, that would not be covered by the Bill. But it is covered. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman misled the people who listened to that radio programme about the precise terms of the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman intervented when my right hon. Friend the Minister of State was arguing that the only defence under the Bill is to obtain a licence. My right hon. Friend explained how appallingly cumbersome that procedure would be and what a burden it would be on the Exchequer. The hon. Gentleman then intervened and referred to clauses 5 and 6. Howeever, those clauses refer only to clause 2, which relates to the use of a dog. Neither

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

clause 5 nor clause 6 provides a defence for clause 3, which refers to snaring. Unless a person has a licence, he will be unable, for example, to snare a mole in his garden. I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman's intention is to make someone whose garden has been ravaged by moles go to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for a licence to control moles—or rats and mice.

The Bill covers a range of necessary innocuous activities that the hon. Gentleman does not intend it to cover. Indeed, he did not know that the Bill covered them when he accepted the draftsman's proposal for the Bill

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend is discussing defences and drawing attention to clause 5, which is meant to provide an exemption. It says that action can be taken, where necessary,

> "for the immediate protection of any domestic or captive animal which was being attacked by a wild mammal".

Does not that mean that, to be effective, packs of foxhounds and walkie-talkie sets must be permanently on call? Clause 5 is totally ridiculous and unworkable.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Neither clause 5 nor clause 6 would protect farmers or people who live in the countryside, or even people with gardens in rural areas, from being accused of committing a criminal offence if they took the steps that were necessary to protect themselves or their property.

There is no doubt that this is a remarkably bad Bill. It is a pity that the House has had to spend this Friday debating a party political issue that should have been dead and buried long ago—*[Interruption.]* I thought that some Opposition Members might find that amusing. The debate should never have taken place.

May I close my remarks with a note of regret, as did Mr. Williams so long ago? The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North is the Opposition spokesman on Northern Ireland. The Bill would not even take effect in Northern Ireland, were it to be passed. It is sad that the hon. Gentleman did not find a better and more relevant cause to put before the House today. I echo the sentiment of Mr. Williams—a former Labour Minister—when he said, in 1949:

> 'Would it not be better to discuss the million people in camps in the depressed areas of Europe? Would it not be better to discuss what an hon. Member opposite writes about so eloquently in 'The Tribune'—what is going on behind the iron curtain?"—[*Official Report*, 25 February 1949; Vol. 461, c. 2238.]

Would not it be better to turn our attention to some of the serious issues facing the Government and the country today instead of wasting time by raking up, once again, the old, divisive socialist desire to abolish fox hunting?

2.9 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I have been present throughout the debate, since 9.35 this morning. I find it most impressive that so many farmer-politicians have found time in their busy lives as farmers to take up their parliamentary duties on a Friday, in order to take part in a debate and vote on the important Bill before the House. Those of a more ungenerous nature than myself may suggest that vested interests are involved, because of the close association between farming and fox hunting, but I do not accept that calumny. I remain impressed by the devotion to duty shown by so many Tory farmers.

However, I am less impressed by the arguments that they advance against the Bill. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who is a member of the Select Committee on Energy, said that he was worried about the Bill's impact on unemployment, and on the 16,000 workers in the British equestrian trade. I could take the hon. Gentleman's concern far more seriously if he had shown any such concern for the thousands of Scottish workers made redundant when British Steel ratted on Ravenscraig and on the Scottish steel industry, or if he had shown any concern for the 2·6 million people whom the Government have made unemployed. I do not take such arguments seriously from opponents of the Bill.

It has been said that opponents of the Bill are just as concerned about the well-being of wild mammals as its supporters. They expect us to believe that, because of such concern, they continue to support the prolonged terrorising of foxes, which are wild mammals. They support the tearing apart of foxes by frenzied packs of hounds, and although they may convince themselves that by taking part in such barbaric practices they show their concern for the well-being of the fox, they would have a hard time convincing the fox of that—or, indeed, of convincing anyone whose view was less prejudiced than theirs.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) began the day with a point of order. Although it was not a bogus point of order, the information that he conveyed was bogus. The hon. Gentleman complained about the postcards distributed by the League Against Cruel Sports to its supporters, some of which have been passed on to hon. Members to try to persuade them to support the Bill. He gave an example of one of his constituents whose name had been used on a postcard without his knowledge or permission. On that shaky foundation the hon. Gentleman argued that the whole exercise conducted by the League Against Cruel Sports was bogus, that the names being sent to hon. Members were fake, and that support for the Bill outside the House was far less than was being claimed.

The hon. Gentleman was eager to interpret in a different light the one example that he gave. However, opponents of the Bill, concerned about the massive support whipped up by the League Against Cruel Sports, may have decided to undermine that campaign by sending bogus postcards. I agree with the advice that has already been given to the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes to pass the matter to the Humberside police. I am sure that they will be able to get to the bottom of it and find out who is trying to kid whom.

The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. N. Ridley) asked whether it was really in the public interest to ban fox hunting. He said that, after all, those who take part choose voluntarily to do so, and that the landowners on whose land hunting takes place give their permission. On that basis, he suggested that the public interest was in no way harmed.

Such logic could be applied to all the other activities that the House has already banned, such as bear baiting, dog fighting and cock fighting. If landowners were prepared to allow people to bait bears on their land and people were prepared voluntarily to take part, would that make it all right? Would that mean that such activities were not against the public interest? Of course not. That was an especially weak argument and, given the high offices of state that the right hon. Gentleman has held, one would have thought that he would know better.

The right hon. Gentleman said that shooting was a crueller way of dealing with foxes than fox hunting. He cited the example of bad shots, who may wound a fox, which leads to unnecessary cruelty and suffering being inflicted. But he could not give a single example of such a thing having happened. Only once during the debate has such an example been given. That was the only evidence that we have heard that such a thing has ever happened. Yet we know, from the RSPCA, the League Against Cruel Sports and other animal welfare bodies that there are countless examples of unnecessary cruelty and suffering being inflicted on foxes by the fox hunters. Given the balance between the two, it is essential that the House should support the Bill. Hon. Members who oppose the Bill will have a hard time convincing voters that it is less cruel to pursue a terrified animal for more than an hour and attack it with terriers or tear it apart with a pack of fierce and frenetic hounds. Nobody is convinced by such specious arguments.

Perhaps the weakest argument was the one about pest control, which does not stand any examination. Opponents of the Bill say that they are concerned about pest control. Why do some hunts rear foxes with the intention of hunting them? No Conservative Member could answer that question. Hunting has nothing to do with pest control. Other hunts keep artificial earths to attract foxes into the area and then hunt them. I thought that the idea of pest control was to limit the number of foxes and not to attract them to an area so that they could then be hunted.

It was said that it was right and natural for man to hunt —a call not so much to go back to the countryside as to the caves. It was said that killing the fox was not important. If it is not important how can it be argued that hunting is necessary to control pests? The Bill's opponents defeated their own arguments and cannot expect anyone to take them seriously. It was said that the chase was all important. What was meant was that the sport—the entertainment—was all important, and that is the kernel of the debate. The Bill's opponents say that it is justified, for reasons of entertainment and sport, to inflict suffering and cruelty on foxes and other wild mammals for the pleasure of men. That is unjustifiable and must be stopped.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McAllion: No. There is not enough time to give way.

We heard the quite extraordinary case of Mr. Harry Roberts, a huntsman who in 1941 was called up to join the Army. As soon as he was called up, the foxes went wild and the number of lambs being killed by foxes shot up. It was said that that was proof positive that fox hunting was necessary to protect hill farming. Of course there are other interpretations, such as that that must have been the first case of draft dodging. If Dan Quayle had thought of such an ingenious device, I am sure that he would have used it in connection with Vietnam. The story proves nothing because there is no proof that fox hunting is necessary to keep pests under control.

I should like to refer to a group called Animal Concern, which describes itself as a select committee of members representing countryside and conservation organisations. I received a letter from the organisation, as I am sure have other hon. Members. That letter does not name the countryside and conservation organisations. For all we know, it may be the Quorn hunt. How can we take seriously the representations of Animal Concern? It says that the real issue at stake in the Bill——

Mr. Moate: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will know that some hon. Members have been here throughout the debate and have not had an opportunity to speak. You will also note that two Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen have taken up an inordinate amount of time by using the subterfuge of speaking from the Back Benches. Will you inquire into that to see whether it is proper for Front-Bench spokesmen to move to the Back Benches and take up the time of the House? If the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) continues to take up so much time, do we assume that he is trying to talk out the Bill?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Nothing out of order has occurred so far.

Mr. McNamara *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 3.

Division No. 82] **[2.25 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, David
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bright, Graham
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Edwards, Huw
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Dame Janet
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grist, Ian
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Hill, James
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)

Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudd, David
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allen
Rooker, Jeff
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Neil
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jerry Hayes and
Mr. Tony Banks.

NOES

Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Conway, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Paul Marland and
Mr. Nicholas Soames.

Question accordingiy agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 187.

Division No. 63] **[2.35 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, David
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bright, Graham
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Edwards, Huw
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Dame Janet
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grist, Ian
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Hayward, Robert
Hill, James
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudd, David
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allen
Rooker, Jeff
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Widdecombe, Ann
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Banks, and
Mr. Jerry Hayes.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas

Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Critchley, Julian
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Emery, Sir Peter
Farr, Sir John
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, David
Trippier, David
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. W. Benyon and
Sir Charles Morrison.

Question accordingly negatived.

TIMESHARE CONTRACTS (TIME FOR RECONSIDERATION) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Second Reading what day? Not moved.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On behalf of my hon. Friend, I move.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should be more alert than apparently he is. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Haynes: On behalf of my hon. Friend, Monday 21 February.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not a Monday.

Mr. Haynes: Friday 21 February, Sir.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 February.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [24 January].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): With the leave of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 13 March.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 13 March.

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (SUPPLY OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 February.

TRAFFIC CALMING BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered

Motion made and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 56 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

HOUSING (FITNESS STANDARD) (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Haynes: With the agreement of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 21 February.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 February.

ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION (COSMETICS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Haynes: With the agreement of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 21 February.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 February.

CARAVAN SITES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not printed. Second Reading what day? No day named.

HOME RULE (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [7 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 13 March.

STILL-BIRTH DEFINITION BILL

Order read for consideration in Committee.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading) and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

MEDICINAL PRODUCTS: PRESCRIPTION BY NURSES ETC. BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 56 (Third Reading) and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

FIREARMS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order read for consideration (not amended in the Standing Committee).

Hon. Members: Object.

Consideration deferred till Friday 21 February.

Computing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

2.50 pm

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): I am glad that the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) is leaving the Chamber. I fear that if he were to oppose to what I have to say in such stentorian tones, I would not get very far.

On the first occasion that I raised the question of computing in the House, I produced a microchip on which it was possible to see about four transistors—and on that I made some fairly far-fetched predictions. Today, it would not be possible to see the structure unless we had an electron microscope, and we all know that such visual aids are deplored by Mr. Speaker. I am saved the burden of elaborate descriptions by the timely publication of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology report just before Christmas. It is the implications for the nation and for Parliament that I want to discuss today, and I am glad to have the opportunity to do so.

It is not just the machine that I wish to discuss, prodigious though its capacity may be, but the institutions, processes and policies required for its effective use. It is not just an old mainframe, as they were called, multiplied by 1,000, 10,000 or even 100,000 times. The difference performance is both quantitative and qualitative. The problems that the new machines can address are those facing mankind, and they are of much the same order of magnitude. Some are known as the "grand challengers", and we all recognise their scale. For example, the data produced by a satellite measuring environmental change amounts to about 1 trillion signals per hour. That would require 40 Washington telephone books per day to store.

I shall give two more illustrations. The human heart consists of millions of cells that communicate electrically in a most complex pattern. To understand how it works or fails, scientists have to construct models. Professor Dennis Noble of Oxford university presented a fascinating paper in Paris this week, pointing out that, even with the fastest existing IBM machine, at present the modelling of a few seconds of the heart's activity requires several minutes. On such a machine, modelling 100,000 cells of what is known as the sinus, let alone the hundreds of millions in the ventricle, is extremely expensive and impractical.

The new type of machine, known as a massively parallel machine, makes that possible. Alas, Professor Noble has to use the United States army computing centre in Minnesota for his work. A new machine on the horizon enables him to envisage what he describes as a reconstruction of the electrical mechanisms of a heart attack. Such is the power of the teraflop machine which Columbia university aims to have developed by 1996.

It is hardly surprising that the machine has been described as the

> "critical tool of the lifesciences in the 21st century".

and an even more significant description is that it

> "provides the human race with its third scientific investigative technique after theory and experiment."

It has immense powers of simulation, which enable us to detect similarities and differences where size and complexity are simply too vast for the unaided human mind.

It is worth making one more point. The machine's technical rate of development is unprecedented for an artefact of such complexity. Its computational power feeds back rapidly into its own design, construction and manufacture.

Why is this important to Parliament and the nation? There are several reasons. Senator Gore of the United States Senate summarised it in a statement he made on introducing a Bill recently:

> "The nation which most completely assimilates high performance computing into its economy will very likely emerge as the dominant intellectual, economic, and technological force in the next century."

That is some claim, but it has evidently been fully accepted by Japan, the United States, Germany and France. I wish that I could say the same for ourselves.

The Japanese Government have formally stated that the development of massively parallel high-performance computing is that country's

> "most important priority for the 90s and has allocated some £200 million for the development of what are known as 'neural networks'."

In 1985, we and the Japanese each had four so-called super-computers. In the brief space of five years, the Japanese have acquired 176, most of which they make themselves, outstripping the United States, which has 162, western Europe, which has 101, and the United Kingdom, which has 21. Even more alarming, perhaps, is that Mexico now has more super-computer capacity than we have. All significant indices of growth and expenditure are in the POST report, which is available to Parliament, so I shall not weary the House by repeating them.

Qualitative aspects are more significant. There is a virtuose circle of semiconductor capability and computing capability which the Japanese in particular have appreciated. They will design and make most things first, fastest and best, as the super-computer facilitates total quality control, among other things. That has particular significance for cars, aerospace, electronics of every kind, and therefore the worldwide pattern and distribution of employment. It is that realisation which has doubtless prompted the United States to set up a series of federally funded super-computer training centres, one of which, at Cornell university, is matched possibly only by that at Edinburgh. It has also prompted a series of United States policy responses, emanating primarily from Congress and the President. I shall describe them, as they are a template against which, I fear, we must judge our own parliamentary and Executive response.

Since 1989, the United States Congress has introduced at least five major Bills, starting with the National High-performance Computing Technology Act. Its committees have conducted seven hearings. It has established a national advisory committee on semiconductors, which concluded recently that, unless the United States spent $1·2 billion per annum on research and development in this area, it would

> "not be a serious competitor in the coming information age."

The President's Office of Science and Technology Policy proposed in 1989 that there should be a massive five-year programme for high-performance computing and networks. Expenditure over five years has doubled from $450 million to £1,000 million. Since 1976, as the OTA pointed out last year, federal funding has grown faster than for any other scientific discipline in the United States. Since their power is dependent on communication networks, the Administration has accepted a programme to raise the network capacity from the present 1·5 megabits to 45 megabits for 200 to 300 users this year and 1 to 3 gigabits, increasing to the order of 1,000 for major research facilities from 1996, when 45 megabits will be available to 1,000 separate institutions.

I now come to the western European and the United Kingdom response to the challenge. There is, I am sorry to say, only one word to describe our response in the United Kingdom. I had on my original draft the word "lamentable", but I thought that that was too harsh. It is a curate's egg—good in parts. Yesterday, I checked with the Library and discovered that, by comparison in the same period, we have had the subject mentioned in six questions in this House, in four in the Lords and in one early-day motion. In December 1990, there was a brief late-night debate on our contribution to the European framework, Jessi and Eureka programmes.

We have, it is true, a £34 million massively parallel computing programme, since this is an area in which we as a nation excel intellectually, as it were. After the POST report, I understand that the Department of Trade and Industry increased its funding for our network, known as JANET, by some £10 million to upgrade it to SuperJANET.

I further understand that the Cabinet Office has now set up a super-computing and networking team to consider the policy implications in the POST report. We have also agreed to take a third of a 25 per cent. share jointly with France and Germany in the European Community's megastream project. The other funds will be provided by the Community and Cable and Wireless.

Rather more depressing is the information that the Advisory Board for the Research Councils has recommended a bit more money for supercomputing over the next three years—the equivalent of £6 million, £7 million and £7·5 million. One must set that in the context of the £90 million spent per annum by Michigan university or any of the major Japanese producers or users. I fear that that will cause a powerful attack of dismay, which will overwhelm us and for which the rhetorical tranquillisers that we employ in this Chamber will prove no cure.

I fear that Parliament must take its full share of the blame for this state of affairs. In the past 18 months, we have screamed at each other across the Floor about unemployment and heavens knows what else, oblivious of the fact that we are witnessing events of far greater significance, which are far more compressed in time, than the industrial revolution.

The OECD, to which we all subscribe, is not unaware of those facts. In its report, "Interdependence and Co-operation in Tomorrow's World", there was a stark warning from Sir Ralf Dahrendorf,

> "There are those who argue that employment is but a passing problem . . . Growth plus training, they say, will deal with all but the most resistant unemployment and in any case there is enough work for all. Such views overlook the deeper issue which is at stake . . . Work, in the sense of paid employment (jobs) has been the key to the entitlement structures of modern societies and to their growth potential. At the same time social, economic and technical factors have conspired to reduce the role of work in people's lives . . . work has become scarce . . . and as a result work based on entitlement structures can no longer be sustained . . . Growth and employment are decoupled."

I agree with that.

The principal technical factor is information technology, which the worldwide motor car industry has been discovering for some time, as it responds to a competitor who made that discovery about 10 years before it. What is as clear as daylight is that, although there is every prospect

[Sir Ian Lloyd]

of manufacturing output and world trade recovering, that recovery will not inevitably or necessarily produce a recovery in employment, especially not in the manufacturing industry. That industry is now following, rather more rapidly, the example set by agriculture, which, in the past few decades, has suffered a dramatic decline.

For that reason I accept Sir Ralf's final conclusion:

> "Traditional big government cannot continue. It is financially non-viable and organisationally inefficient and fails to engender the degree of support that is a necessary condition of effectiveness . . . New entitlement issues are as much a result of old solutions as they are answered by them. Neither the new unemployment nor the new poverty can be remedied by the traditional instruments of the Welfare State."

What are our policy responses? First the good news, as they say. I was informed only this morning that the United Kingdom has the largest single computerisation programme in western Europe. That is excellent, but with what is it concerned—wealth creation or wealth redistribution? Alas, it is the latter. Doubtless that is justifiable and necessary, but should it have come first?

I am advised that the Science and Engineering Research Council, acting as agent for the Advisory Board for the Research Councils is considering the purchase of a large Cray vector machine and that the ABRC has recommended a modest increase in expenditure on this of £6 million, £7 million and £7·5 million over the next three years. That is extremely modest when one realises that the world's most powerful machine, the SX3 made by NEC in Japan costs between £10 and £15 million for a single output. The bad news is that, although that particular Cray offers between a threefold and a fourfold improvement in performance, a major single university in the United States is taking delivery of a Cray which offers a sixteenfold improvement.

The main question for us is not whether it is too late for the United Kingdom or western Europe to compete with the Crays. It is worth remembering that Europe has not one single producer in this area. That round has been lost. The question is whether by appropriate policy decisions, we will be able to attain and maintain a satisfactory position in the massively parallel computers sector, based on the British transputer in which we and Europe have considerable strength and maintain the lead. Two of the five manufacturers in Europe are in the United Kingdom.

The answer is yes, but there are some ifs. First, we must recognise that this is what is known as an enabling technology, which is crucial to the economic and industrial performance of western Europe. Secondly, whatever our political prejudices—I know how deep they run in the House—we in the United Kingdom will not succeed unless we recognise that if our competitors' programmes are based on a massive combined effort of state and private resources, we alone will not be able to do it without an injection of public money on a sufficient scale.

Thirdly, we shall not succeed if we pitch the level of investment commitment just below that needed for success and withdraw support when the going gets rough. The Inmos story deserves a closer analysis than it has so far received, for yet again British innovation has formed the basis of a massive new industry and investment abroad. This morning's announcement by IBM that that large organisation was going for a massively huge parallel computer has great significance.

In that context, we should consider carefully the recommendations of the Office of Science and Technology Policy's report to President Bush, since they apply to us. One says, for example:

> "Unless the nation acts immediately to promote its position in critical generic technologies, United States competitiveness will erode further with disastrous consequences for . . . jobs, economic growth and national security."

Another says that the advanced technology programme is designed to provide support without picking winners and losers, and that that requires in turn

> "a fundamental change in the way United States industry competes in the market place."

The enabling Bill enjoys bipartisan support. Congress has provided $289 million this year and $347 million next year.

Fourthly, as a nation we need more thinking and analysis—with less ranting and raving—not least in this place. The whole profile of the science base, and science policy and its direction and priorities must achieve a much higher profile, and Parliament and Government together must do that. It cannot be done without an informed Parliament.

Fifthly, we must accept that the age of automation has arrived and will not go away. It is not a question of whether and how we should revive manufacturing employment, but whether and how to maintain the wealth-creating capacity of the manufacturing system, which is now following the pattern set by agriculture.

The concomitant question—how to restructure the whole of the entitlement apparatus previously attached to manufacturing employment—is far more difficult, and the sooner we start thinking about it the better. To do otherwise may afford political parties the illusion that they are shooting each other in the body, but in practice we shall all be shooting the nation in the foot.

Sir Herman Bondi, the former master of Churchill college, said recently, in a brilliant paper on Isaac Newton, that the problems faced by society could be classified into three parts—that 80 per cent. were trivial, 19·5 per cent. were insoluble and it required a genius to identify and solve the remaining 0·5 per cent. We have the tools and we know the 0·5 per cent. We must now finish the job.

3.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): I wish at the outset to welcome the report on high performance computing prepared by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. As the House knows, my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) is the distinguished chairman of that body. He is probably the leading advocate of science in the House, which is why we always listen with great care to what he has to say.

We are indebted to my hon. Friend for bringing to our attention the main findings of the report. He always speaks with great knowledge. Indeed, the House of Commons is at its best when an hon. Member with such deep interest and knowledge of a subject speaks on it. We in government do our best to address the problems that we face. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the way in which he made his speech.

The Government share my hon. Friend's view that high-performance computing is a vitally important and rapidly developing area of information technology. It is right that the House should devote time to discussing that important aspect of technology, which has far-reaching implications for research and development activities, in academia and in industry and commerce.

There has been a great deal of discussion and activity in that area in many countries. The findings of the POST report will make a valuable contribution to the consideration that has been given by the Government to the priorities for the provision and application of high-performance computers in the United Kingdom.

My Department and the Department of Education and Science have a particular interest in that, but other Departments are also involved; for example, the Department of the Environment has important commitments to supercomputing for climate modelling research.

My Department believes that it is important to emphasise the solutions which this high-performance can deliver and to promote the benefits that can be gained by industry and academia.

As for the development of high-performance computers, as the POST report identifies, the highest performance supercomputers are currently built exclusively in the United States and Japan. My hon. Friend brought out that point in his speech. But the manufacturers of parallel computers are much more widely spread, and this country is particularly well represented in both the design and the development of those machines.

The "Transputer"—a powerful "computer on a chip" especially suitable for parallel processing—was designed and built here, and a number of companies here have developed powerful machines based on that device.

The "distributed array processor"—an alternative approach to parallel processing—was designed and built here, and it received the Queen's award for innovation in 1991.

My Department and the Department of Education and Science, through the Science and Engineering Research Council, have given substantial support to research and development in the field of parallel architecture computers, through our joint framework for information technology; and I assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to do so.

The really large research and development activities that are necessary today to produce the next generations of parallel machines are now being supported by the Commission of the European Communities, under the Esprit programme. We believe that that is the right way ahead for our companies and academics, rather than concentrating on solely national initiatives. Only through such an approach can our companies access the world-size markets needed for commercial success.

Our policy is—here as elsewhere—to ensure that the objectives of the European Commission's initiative are realistic and attainable, and that the expenditure plans are well judged and reflect appropriate priority for that among other areas within the Esprit framework.

The availability of high-performance computers has also been raised. The POST report considers two aspects of availability: the provision of machines of the highest performance to researchers in the academic community; and their availability to industrial research workers.

The provision of supercomputing facilities for academic research is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science, through its Advisory Board for the Research Councils. I shall ensure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is made fully aware of the excellent points made by my hon. Friend today. That board now has responsibility for supporting the three academic supercomputing centres at Manchester university, London university and the Rutherford Appleton laboratory of the Science and Engineering Research Council. My right hon. and learned Friend has recently made available the sum of £20 million over the next three years to enhance the provision of facilities for the research councils and the academic sector.

Many other university departments have both advanced computing resources and a pool of skills in high-performance computing with parallel machines. I believe that all that activity must be taken into account when assessing how well our academic community is provided for in this vitally important area.

To make the best use of the national high-performance computing resources, high-speed networks are required so that remote users can communicate with the machines and receive their results. To provide such facilities for the academic sector, I am pleased that the Department of Education and Science has been able to make additional capital funds available to the Universities Funding Council. I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome that. This will allow them to begin the development of a new, high-speed academic network, SuperJANET, that will offer many benefits in addition to improving access to high-performance computers. I was grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning SuperJANET in his speech.

My Department welcomes this activity and wishes to explore ways in which industrial users could gain access to such a high-speed network. Both academic and industrial users will also need access to efficient high-speed networking across Europe and worldwide. We are supporting current European network programmes and further discussions that aim to extend that capability.

Obviously, availability to industry is a matter of particular interest to me and, although my Department does not consider it appropriate to use public funds to make machines directly available for industry, we accept that there is a need for greater involvement by the industrial sector. We want to ensure that industry can make informed choices about the computing resources appropriate for particular applications.

We are aware that few organisations have yet installed their own high-performance computers, but some are exploring the possibilities of such machines, using the resources available from academia. Still more organisations are collaborating in our new programme to demonstrate the development of real industrial applications on high-performance machines. It is the Government's role to address sluggish development in the marketplace, and to provide encouragement to industry to address its own problems, but, as I am sure my hon. Friend agrees, the commercial decisions must always remain with industry. I hope that my hon. Friend will note the point that I wish to emphasise—that it is indeed our role to address sluggish development in the marketplace. Therefore, the debate is timely. As one of the constraints to market development, the POST report identifies lack of software and difficult programming as barriers to the industrial take-up of the machines.

My Department, with the Science and Engineering Research Council, has recently launched the parallel applications programme, to help to overcome those barriers. The programme has a total value of about £39 million, with £13 million of Government funding, and it is

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supporting four centres, chosen by competition, at Edinburgh, London, Oxford and—I am glad to say—Southampton. Those centres will collaborate with industrial partners to develop solutions to real industrial problems. Such applications will act as exemplars to other industrial organisations of what can be achieved with this technology. They should indeed then be able to offer the "one stop shop" support for parallel computing which the POST report recommends, based on the example of the university of Maryland super-computing centre.

I am sure that the parallel applications centres will make a major impact on industrial competence and take-up in this vital area. My Department is also considering whether it is appropriate to mount additional initiatives.

I have spoken about initiatives within academia, and the academic role in ensuring that academia has the skills and capabilities needed to prosecute its own research programmes. Academia has a role, too, in reducing the barriers to industrial take-up—by communicating new developments to industry in a way which is relevant and exciting, by seeking industrial involvement in appropriate projects, and especially by producing skilled graduates, who will move into their industrial careers and transfer that important technology with them.

In conclusion, I welcome the POST report, and confirm that the Government are sympathetic to many of the views expressed therein. We do not propose sweeping or dramatic measures in the short term, but I am confident that, with the initiatives already under way and planned, and with the technical developments on the horizon, the United Kingdom is on course to be in a much stronger position in high-performance computing over the next few years. The debate will have brought that process ever closer. I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 February 1992

ENVIRONMENT

Enterprise Zone, Whitehaven

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has yet received the consultants' report into the effects of an enterprise zone in Whitehaven; (2) when he intends to publish the findings of the report into the effects of an enterprise zone for Whitehaven; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: We expect to receive the final draft of the consultants' report on enterprise zone status for Barrow and Whitehaven shortly. It is not the Department's practice to publish these reports. There is a statutory consultation procedure before any zones can be designated.

Part-ownership Schemes

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total cost to date of setting up, publicising and administering the flexi-ownership or rents into mortgage schemes piloted in *(a)* Basildon and *(b)* Milton Keynes; and how many tenants have so far acquired part-ownership of their homes under this scheme.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 9 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *314*. Since then, three more sales have been completed in Basildon where the pilot scheme is still in operation, bringing the total sales to 98.

Personal Allowances and Housing Premiums

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how *(a)* personal allowances and *(b)* housing premiums are established within applicable amounts calculated against net weekly income, for the purposes of renovation grant applications; and what account of regional cost variations is made in this process.

Mr. Yeo: The personal allowances and premiums used to calculate the applicable amount in the test of resources for house renovation grants are based on those used for housing benefit. They cover the essential weekly living expenses of the individual grant applicant and the applicant's family and are uprated annually in line with changes to housing benefit. The universal grant premium of £22 per week awarded to all grant applicants is intended to cover other household outgoings, including housing costs. It is also uprated annually in line with inflation. No account is taken of regional cost variations.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how *(a)* housing premiums and *(b)* personal allowances take account of individual circumstances; and what influence mortgage rates or rent variations have upon assessments.

Mr. Yeo: The test of resources for house renovation grants largely follows housing benefit rules in taking account of the individual circumstances of grant applicants. Each applicant and relevant person associated with an application is awarded personal allowances to reflect their particular needs. A variety of premiums may also be awarded in respect of special needs such as lone parenthood, old age or disability. These are added together to provide an overall assessment of individual needs. The £22 grant premium which all grant applicants receive to cover other household expenses, including housing costs, is then added to the total. Changes in interest rates are reflected in the calculation of the national loan a grant applicant is deemed able to afford. No account is taken of rent variations.

House Condition Survey

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the English housing condition survey to be published.

Mr. Yeo: The results will be published in 1993.

Housing Renovation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he encourages local authorities to identify housing in severe need of renovation; what resources are targeted towards such housing; and what was the total renovation grant awarded in the last year in which figures are available for households without elderly and disabled persons.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities are required to consider housing conditions in their area at least once a year to identify unfit properties and the best way to deal with them. Each authority receives an allowance for specified capital grant, as part of its annual housing investment programme allocation, for expenditure on private sector renewal including house renovation grants and slum clearance. Information on approved renovation grant expenditure on households without elderly and disabled persons is not available.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in descending order the 1992-93 standard spending assessments per head for designated poll tax contributions in each district council area in England and also show in each case figures per head per poll tax payer for *(a)* enhanced population, *(b)* density, *(c)* sparsity and *(d)* all-ages social index, in each case multiplied by the appropriate scaling factor.

Mr. Portillo: A table showing the requested information has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to bring forward legislation to implement his draft circular on local authorities' assets in companies.

Mr. Portillo: The Government propose to implement part V of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 —local authorities' interests in companies—in due course when the drafting of the necessary secondary legislation has been completed.

Nitrogen Dioxide

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on United Kingdom compliance with the EC directive on nitrogen dioxide.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has complied in full with the EC directive on nitrogen dioxide. Except for a purely technical breach at the west London monitoring site in London in 1989, of which the Commission was informed as required by the directive, no breach of the directive's air quality limit values has occurred.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the criteria used in choosing site locations for nitrogen dioxide monitoring stations.

Mr. Baldry: For the purposes of monitoring compliance with EC directive 85/203/EEC, sites have been chosen in accordance with the criteria set out in annex III of the directive. In summary, sites must include examples of areas predominately affected by motor pollution and of areas where discharges from fixed sources also make a significant contribution to pollution. They should be chosen as far as possible from sites where the risk of public exposure is greatest.

Urban Air Pollution

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has received from Environmental Resources Ltd. in respect of extending the urban air pollution monitoring network.

Mr. Baldry: Advice from Environmental Resources Ltd. is contained in its report to the Department of the Environment—"Extended Urban Monitoring—a Feasibility Study 1991"—a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. The first phase of an extension of the network, on the lines recommended, came into operation on 23 January this year.

Pollution (Prosecutions)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *478*, if he will name the companies successfully prosecuted by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution since 30 November 1990, the locations of the incidents and the type of pollution caused.

Mr. Trippier: The information requested is as follows:

Company	*Location*	*Offence*	*Pollution caused*
George M. Watson (Construction) Ltd.	Denholme, Bradford	Operation of mineral crushing and screening plant without registration	No pollution
Cotswold Stone Quarries	Swellwold Quarry, Stow on the Wold	Operation of mineral works without registration	No pollution
North West Aggregates Ltd.	Huyton, Merseyside	Operation of road stone coating plant without registration	No pollution
Hickson and Welch	Castleford, Yorkshire	Operation of a chemical process without registration	No pollution
Atomic Energy Authority	Harwell, Oxon	Breach of conditions of authorisation in relation to discharge of radioactive tritium gas	No material pollution: no hazard to environment or health
British Nuclear Fuels plc	Springfields, Lancs	Breach of conditions of authorisation in relation to disposal of low level solid radioactive waste	No material pollution: no hazard to environment or health

Air Quality

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his action plan for dealing with breaches of World Health Organisation and EC air quality standards on reduction of pollutants.

Mr. Baldry: The World Health Organisation does not set air quality standards, but rather guidelines intended to provide background information and guidance to Governments. The environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" and the anniversary report published last September contain the Government's action plan for reducing air pollution, including measures to ensure that the few remaining areas where a risk of breaching the limit values for smoke and sulphur dioxide in EC directive 80/779/EEC remains will comply fully when their derogations from the directive expire in April 1993.

Rent Arrears

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which 20 local authorities have the highest level of rent arrears.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which 20 local authorities have the highest rent arrears as a percentage of the total rent roll.

Sir George Young: I have today arranged for information on rent arrears in all English local authorities, as at 1 April 1991, to be placed in the library.

On this date total rent arrears owing to housing authorities in England amounted to some £430 million, representing 8·5 per cent. of the total rent collectable in 1990-91. This is an increase of £70 million—18 per cent. —compared with 1 April 1990. The 20 authorities with the poorest performance, in terms of arrears as a percentage of their rent roll, account for 50 per cent. of the total. Of these, 10 account for £156 million—37 per cent.—of the national total and all have arrears of over 20 per cent. of the rent collectable, the highest—Southwark—having estimated rent arrears of 38·5 per cent. London accounts for £200 million—46 per cent. of the total—and has eight of the 10 and 12 of the 20 poorest performing authorities.

These figures show that the position in far too many authorities has worsened since 1989-90. Authorities with similar holdings of stock and rent levels, and subject to similar economic pressures, turn in widely different levels of performance. The explanation for this lies in the quality of their management. The annual reports which most authorities have now supplied to their tenants, and to my Department, show considerable variation in management standards. Efficiency at collecting rent is the most fundamental of these standards. Authorities cannot hope to deliver effective services to their tenants if they do not collect the rent which pays for those services.

It is particularly disappointing that there was no overall change in the position in London at March last year, though some authorities have taken vigorous action to improve their performance.

All councils have a duty to look after the interests of all their tenants. Better performance in collecting rents will increase resources available for housing and reduce pressure for rent increases.

Area Protection Grant

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any local authorities to add to the list, given in his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *276*, of those which will lose area protection grant in 1992-93.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 31 January 1992]*: I regret that the table given in my answer of 23 January was incomplete. The correct information is shown in the following table.

Reduction in area protection grant between 1991-92 and 1992-93

Local authority	*(£ million)*	*(£ adult)*
Greenwich	−4·1	−25
Hammersmith and Fulham	−3·0	−25
Lambeth	−0·4	−2
Lewisham	−4·2	−25
Southwark	−3·7	−25
Tower Hamlets	−3·3	−25
Wandsworth	−5·6	−25
Barking and Dagenham	−2·8	−25
Hillingdon	−3·0	−17
Rochdale	−3·8	−25
Tameside	−4·0	−25
Wigan	−5·7	−25
Barnsley	−4·3	−25
Doncaster	−5·6	−25
Rotherham	−4·9	−25
Sheffield	−10·1	−25
Gateshead	−4·2	−25
North Tyneside	−2·4	−16
South Tyneside	−3·0	−25
Sunderland	−5·5	−25
Bradford	−8·1	−25
Calderdale	−3·7	−25
Kirklees	−7·3	−25
Wakefield	−5·9	−25
Hartlepool	−1·7	−25
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	−0·8	−7
Middlesbrough	−1·5	−15
Allerdale	−1·8	−25
Barrow-in-Furness	−1·5	−25
Carlisle	−1·5	−19
Copeland	−1·4	−25
Eden	−0·9	−25
Amber Valley	−2·2	−25
Bolsover	−1·4	−25
Chesterfield	−1·9	−25
Erewash	−2·1	−25
High Peak	−1·6	−25
North East Derbyshire	−1·9	−25
Torridge	−1·0	−25
Chester-le-Street	−0·7	−18
Derwentside	−1·6	−25
Durham	−0·5	−7
Easington	−1·9	−25
Sedgefield	−1·7	−25
Teesdale	−0·5	−25
Wear Valley	−1·3	−25
Boothferry	−1·2	−25
Cleethorpes	−1·1	−21
East Yorkshire	−1·6	−25
Great Grimsby	−1·4	−21
Holderness	−0·3	−8
Kingston upon Hull	−5·1	−25
Scunthorpe	−1·2	−25
Blackburn	−2·5	−25
Blackpool	−1·1	−10
Burnley	−1·7	−25
Hyndburn	−1·5	−25
Pendle	−1·7	−25
Rossendale	−1·2	−25
Alnwick	−0·5	−23
Berwick-upon-Tweed	−0·5	−25
Blyth Valley	−1·5	−25
Wansbeck	−1·2	−25
Craven	−1·0	−25
Ryedale	−0·3	−5
Scarborough	−2·1	−25
Selby	−0·4	−7
York	−2·0	−25
Ashfield	−2·1	−25
Mansfield	−1·7	−23
Stoke-on-Trent	−1·5	−8

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many victims received compensation of between £750 and £1,000 from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board for the last year for which figures are available; and what percentage this was of the total number of victims who received compensation.

Mr. John Patten: Details of awards made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board within various bands are given in the board's published annual reports. Copies are held in the Library.

The precise number of awards between £750 and £1,000 is not available, but the estimated figure for 1990-91 is 5,760, which represents 16·4 per cent. of all awards made.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what checks are made to ensure that all vehicles on the road have valid vehicle excise duty licences;

(2) what procedures are followed if a vehicle is found on the road without a valid current vehicle excise duty licence.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Police officers and traffic wardens support regular enforcement campaigns run by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. Police officers and traffic wardens also routinely report the details of parked vehicles displaying either invalid vehicle excise duty—VED—licences or none at all to the DVLA which checks whether VED offences have been committed and takes any enforcement action required. Where other motoring offences have also been detected all offences are generally processed by the police.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what penalties are applicable to a person convicted of owning or keeping a motor vehicle on the road without a valid motor vehicle excise duty licence.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A person convicted under section 8 of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 of the offence of using or keeping on a public road a motor vehicle without a valid excise duty licence is liable to a maximum penalty of a fine of up to £400 or five times the annual duty chargeable for the vehicle, whichever is greater. In addition the payment of any back duty which is owing is recoverable by court order at the same time. The maximum fine for the offence is to be increased to £1,000 later this year.

Prisons

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has the power to terminate contracts with privately run prisons in the event of either a breach of contract or change of Government policy.

Mrs. Rumbold: Yes.

Wolds Prison

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Wolds prison will be covered by crown immunity.

Mrs. Rumbold: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedure will be followed immediately after the admission of an inmate to Wolds prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: The requirements for the reception and induction procedures at Wolds are set out in section C and D of the operational specification, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House on 2 May 1991.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether extra costs in the event of prisoner disorder at Wolds prison involving the use of the emergency services or crown employees will be met by the contractors or from public funds.

Mrs. Rumbold: Any such costs would be met from public funds unless the disorder were attributable to the contractor's failure to carry out his duties under the contract properly.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances he will direct prison service employees into Wolds prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: Prison service staff may be required to go into Wolds prison as part of their normal duties in a variety of circumstances, ranging from the in-house presence of the controller to attendance in the event of a Crown servant being appointed as governor under section 88 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the director of Wolds prison has the power to refuse entry to any prisoner who has been duly remanded to it by the courts.

Mrs. Rumbold: The contract with Group 4 Remand Services Limited is for the management of a 320-place remand prison for category B prisoners. Subject to those limits on the number and category of prisoners to be held there, it will not be open to the director of the prison to refuse entry to any prisoner who has been duly remanded in custody by the courts.

Club Membership

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will propose amendments to the relevant legislation so as to exclude from the remit of the Commission for Racial Equality matters associated with club membership.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have no plans to amend the legislation in this way.

Citizenship

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review that part of the British Nationality Act 1981 which removed the automatic right to British citizenship to any person born in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Charities

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those charities which are *(a)* exempt charities and *(b)* excepted charities.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 31 January 1992]*: Exempt charities are those listed in the second schedule of the Charities Act 1960, as amended. They are:

The Universities of Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Bristol, Reading, Nottingham, Southampton, Hull, Exeter and Leicester;

The Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, London and Durham, the colleges and halls in the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Durham and the Colleges of Winchester and Eton;

The University of Newcastle Upon Tyne;

The Universities of Keele, Sussex, Wales, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Lancaster, Warwick, York, Bradford, Surrey, Aston and Salford, Loughborough University of Technology, the City University, Brunel University, the Open University, Bath University of Technology and the University Colleges of Wales, Aberystwyth, North Wales, South Wales Monmouthshire and Swansea and St. David's College, Lampeter;

The University of London including Bedford College for Women, Birkbeck College, Imperial College of Science and Technology, London School of Economics and Political Science, Queen Elizabeth College, Queen Mary College, Royal Holloway College, Royal Veterinary College, School or Oriental and African Studies, School of Pharmacy University of London, Westfield College London, College of St. Gregory and St. Martin at Wye, Chelsea College of Science and Technology, University College London and the Institute of Education;

Charing Cross Hospital Medical School, Guy's Hospital Medical School, King's College Medical School, London Hospital Medical College, Middlesex Hospital Medical School, Royal Dental Hospital of London School of Dental Surgery, Royal Free Hospital Medical School, Medical College of St Bartholomew's Hospital in the City of London, St George's Hospital Medical School, St Mary's Hospital Medical School, St Thomas's Hospital Medical School, United Medical and Dental Schools of Guy's and St Thomas's Hospitals, United Medical Schools Guy's and St Thomas's Hospitals, University College Medical School and Westminister Medical School;

British Postgraduate Federation, Postgraduate Medical School of London, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Institutes of Cancer Research: Royal Cancer Hospital, Cardiology, Child Health, Dental Surgery, Dermatology, Diseases of the Chest Laryngology and Ontology, Neurology (Queen Square), Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Ophthalmology, Orthopaedics, Psychiatry, Urology;

Welsh National School of Medicine and University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology;

The Boards of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Science Museum, the Armouries and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew;

The British Museum which includes the British Museum of Natural History;

The Imperial War Museum and the National Maritime Museum;

The representative body of the Welsh Church;

property within the Church Lands Investment Measure 1958;

The Church Commissioners and any institution which is administered by them;

The board and Governors of the Museum of London;

The British Library; and

Grant-maintained schools and any institution administered by or on behalf of such schools. Higher Education Corporations and Institutions administered by or on behalf of them, for example, polytechnics and colleges of higher education, but only if so designated by the Secretary of State.

Charities excepted by order or regulations under section 4(4)(b) of the Charities Act 1960 are:

All voluntary schools, being charites and having no permanent endowment other than the premises of, or connected with, the school;

Charities comprising funds, not being permanent endowments, belonging to units, or to trustees for units, of the Boy Scouts Association or the Girl Guides Association;

Any property, other than land, held and applicable for the general purposes of bodies established wholly or mainly for religious purposes, whether or not of the Christian religion, provided that the annual income from such property is not more than £100;

Any charity for the advancement of religion where the application of its income in a particular manner is conditional upon a grave, tomb or personal monument being kept in good order provided that the annual income of the charity is not more than £50;

A charity wholly or mainly concerned with the advancement of religion, being a charity—in respect of which accounts are sent annually to the Methodist Conference or other Committee or department appointed or established by the Methodist Conference or for which the Baptist and Congregational Trust Corporations is trustee or custodian trustee;

Any charity wholly or mainly concerned with the advancement of religion in respect of property for the time being held by one of 51 Church of England Trust Corporations either as a duly constituted trustee or a custodian trustee or by virtue of the property having been vested in the body by or in pursuance of any Church of England Measure;

Any charity wholly or mainly concerned with the promotion of the efficiency of any of the armed forces of the Crown, not being: a charity having any land in England and Wales for any estate or any interest greater than a tenancy from year to year; a charity whose objects extend to the relief or assistance of any person not being a serving member of those forces; or a charity for the exhibition or preservation of articles of historical interest;

every university which is not an exempt charity;

Certain charities of which the Moravian Union Incorporated is a trustee;

Certain charities of which the New Church is a trustee;

Certain charities of which St. David's Diocesan Board of Finance is a trustee;

Certain charities of which Liverpool Roman Catholic Archdiocesan Trustees Incorporated is a trustee;

Certain charities of which the St. Asaph Diocesan Board of Finance is a trustee;

Certain charities of which the Trustees of the Menevia Diocesan Trust are the trustees;

Certain charities of which Swansea and Brecon Diocesan Trust (Incorporated) is a trustee;

Certain charities of which Clifton Catholic Diocesan Trustees Registered is the trustee;

Certain charities of which the Trustees of Middlesbrough Diocesan Trust are the trustees;

Certain charities of which Nottingham Roman Catholic Diocesan Trustees Registered is a trustee;

Certain charities of which Plymouth Roman Catholic Trustees Registered is a trustee;

Certain charities of which United Synagogue Trustees Ltd. is a trustee;

Benevolent funds in connection with specified branches of United Commercial Travellers Association of Great Britain and Ireland Incorporated; and

Registered places of worship.

Section 4(4)(c) of the 1960 Act excepts charities which have neither any permanent endowment, nor any income from property amounting to more than £15 a year, nor the use and occupation of any land.

There is no central record of charities excepted under section s.4(4)(c) of the 1960 Act, and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Maxwell Companies

Mr. Allason: To ask the Attorney-General if he will ask the Serious Fraud Office to extend its current investigations of Mirror Group Newspapers to include the piracy of computer software at Mirror Group Newspaper's headquarters.

The Attorney-General: No. The role of the SFO is to investigate and prosecute serious and complex fraud. Its current investigation into the affairs of Mirror Group Newspapers does not include any allegation of piracy of computer software and no material has been placed before the SFO which would justify extending its scope in the manner suggested by my hon. Friend.

PRIME MINISTER

Blindness

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister what action he proposes to undertake as a result of the findings of the Royal National Institute of the Blind survey into provisions for the blind and partially sighted.

The Prime Minister: I welcome the survey as a useful supplement to the information contained in earlier surveys of disability. Ministerial colleagues in the Departments of Health, of Social Security and of Employment have met or will shortly be meeting representatives of the Royal National Institute for the Blind to discuss the implications of the survey for their programmes. The survey is also being carefully considered in other departments with an interest.

Lamplugh School

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from Lamplugh school, Frizington, Cumbria; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Three representations were received during 1990.

Ehenside School

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from Ehenside school, Cleator moor; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Falkland Islands (Ultraviolet Light)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies Her Majesty's Government have carried out or commissioned regarding the possible effects of exposure to ultraviolet light on the wildlife and ecosystems in the Falklands and the waters surrounding them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Neither Her Majesty's Government nor the Falkland Islands Government have carried out, or commissioned, such studies.

Iraq (Nuclear Facilities)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *385*, if he will identify any of those Iraqi nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards which were targeted and damaged by Allied bombing in Operation Granby/Desert Storm.

Mr. Garel-Jones: All the nuclear facilities declared to the IAEA for inspection purposes under Iraq's safeguards agreement with the agency were located at Tuwaitha, Baghdad. Tuwaitha has been visited on a number of occasions by the inspection teams, whose reports, which include details of bomb damage to the facilities concerned, are available in the House of Commons Library.

European Year of Elderly People

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department is making for the European year of elderly people and solidarity between the generations in 1993.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has the lead responsibility in this area, and I refer my hon. Friend to his reply. In drawing up plans for the European year, the Department of Health is consulting a wide range of national voluntary and professional bodies, statutory authorities and other relevant Government Departments.

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek a meeting with Dr. Anre Zagorsky of the Non-Proliferation Association of Moscow to discuss the physical and organisational security for nuclear weapons and warheads withdrawn from deployment in the commonwealth of independent states.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have no plans to do so. However, the United Kingdom technical mission which the Prime Minister announced after his meeting with President Yeltsin will be discussing these matters with the responsible authorities.

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the strength of sensitive technologies and material export controls in *(a)* Russia and *(b)* the other republics of the former Soviet Union, since the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The ability of Russia and the other republics of the former Soviet Union to maintain effective controls on the export of sensitive technologies and materials is a matter of continuing concern. We have raised this subject in our contacts with some of the states in question, and are in touch with our friends and allies to determine how best we can offer advice and assistance.

Iraq (United Nations Inspection)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the findings of the ninth special inspection team visit by International Atomic Energy Agency experts under the United Nations special commission to Iraq arrangements.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The final report of the ninth inspection visit by International Atomic Energy Agency experts to Iraq under the terms of Security Council resolution 687 has not yet been published. Once received it will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Somalia

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the progress achieved by the administration in the northern part of Somalia, known as the Republic of Somaliland, towards regional stability; and what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to provide development aid as well as humanitarian aid.

Mrs. Chalker: Northern Somalia has been more stable than the south since the fall of Siad Barre, although there are reports of some violent incidents in recent weeks. Our development aid programme to Somalia was closed in 1991. We have no present plans to reinstate it. We continue to provide aid in the north for projects which address both immediate humanitarian and rehabilitation needs.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Labour Costs

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the prices of output is represented by the cost of labour.

Mr. Mellor: Labour costs in the forms of wages and salaries, income in kind and employers' contributions to social security and other social benefit arrangements averaged some 65 per cent. of the value at current factor cost of gross domestic product during the 10 years up to 1990. During the first three quarters of 1991 the figure was around 67 per cent.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the highest rate of VAT; what goods or services carried this rate; and between what dates it was in force.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The highest rate of VAT applied to goods and services was 25 per cent. It was introduced on 18 November 1974 when it applied only to petrol. On 1 May 1975 its scope was extended to cover domestic electrical appliances, radios, televisions, hi-fi equipment, pleasure boats and aircraft, towing caravans, photographic equipment, furs, jewellery and services associated with these goods. The higher rate was reduced to 12½ per cent. on 12 April 1976 and abolished on 18 June 1979.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue cost in 1992-93 and 1993-94 of raising the registration threshold for VAT to *(a)* £50,000 and *(b)* £52,000.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* The revenue cost of raising the VAT threshold to either £50,000 or £52,000 is estimated to be of the order of £150 million in a full year.

Royal Mint Advisory Committee

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who are the members of the Royal Mint Advisory Committee; when they were appointed; and what is their function.

Mr. Maples: The members of the Royal Mint Advisory Committee on the design of coins, medals, seals and decorations, and their dates of appointment are:

	Date
HRH The Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh (President)	1952
Mr. A. D. Garrett (Deputy Master of the Mint) (Chairman)	1989
The Most Honourable the Marchioness of Anglesey	1991
Professor E. Arthur Bell	1992
Mr. N. D. Cadbury	1985
Sir Hugh Casson	1971
Dr. C. E. Challis	1991
Sir Colin Cole	1985
Mr. Vincent Duggleby	1985
Sir John Hale	1979
Mr. Michael A. Harvey	1991
Mr. Bryan Kneale	1992
Mr. John Porteous	1968
Miss Marina Warner	1985

The function of the Committee is to advise the Master of the Mint—the Chancellor of the Exchequer—on the selection of new designs, for coins, medals, seals and decorations.

Revenue Total

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cumulative amount of revenue received by the Exchequer since 1979, in 1991-92 prices, from *(a)* North sea oil, *(b)* privatisation and *(c)* council house sales.

Mr. Maples: The information on North sea revenues was given in reply to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) on 18 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *165*, and the figures for privatisation proceeds can be found in table 1A.1 of the 1991 "Autumn Statement." Central Government have received no revenue from the sale of local authority housing.

Income Tax

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many self-employed people paid income tax in 1990-91 and 1991-92; and how many he estimates will pay income tax in 1992-93.

Mr. Maude: The number of taxpaying individuals whose main source of income is from self employment is estimated at about 2·8 million for each of these years assuming statutory indexation of allowances in 1992-93.

Nuclear Power Industry

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *388*, he will outline the reasons underlying the decision to treat differently the financing arrangements of British Nuclear Fuels and Nuclear Electric.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* Nuclear Electric is classified to the public sector. Its requirement for external finance thus counts toward the public sector borrowing requirement. British Nuclear Fuels is classified to the company sector. Its requirement for finance will only count to the public sector borrowing requirement to the extent that it is met by lending or other forms of financial support from the public sector.

Cars (Employers' Payments)

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what information he has on the total paid by employers to employees for car use both in the public and private sectors and the part thereof which is liable for tax;

(2) what information he has on the funds made available by employers to employees for the purchase of cars in any recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* Precise estimates are not available. Very approximate estimates based on survey information are that some £1 billion was paid in 1989-90 towards purchase, hire or running costs of cars used by about 2 million employees for business mileage. The taxable components of these payments cannot be separated from other taxable expense payments but are believed to be no more than £200 million.

Small Businesses

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from representatives of small businesses concerning the recent codes of practice issues by the four clearing banks.

Mr. Maples: None, although a number have commented publicly.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to assist Zimbabwe in response to the prolonged drought in parts of the country; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have offered to help Zimbabwe draw up a national water sector plan and to help Bulawayo, one of the areas hit hardest by the present drought, to manage its water supplies to maximum effect. We also have commitments of some £3 million in support, both directly and through non-governmental organisations, of work which addresses needs in drought-prone areas of the country. Projects include research into dryland cropping and small-scale irrigation techniques and funding of village-level water supply and improvement schemes. Other proposals are being considered.

Kenya

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current aid programme to Kenya.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1990, the last year for which figures are available, our gross bilateral aid programme, including Commonwealth Development Corporation disbursements of £2·2 million to Kenya, was £44 million.

Africa (Education Aid)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid in the field of education he will provide in 1992 for Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia.

Mrs. Chalker: During 1992 we will continue our substantial educational and training programmes for these four countries, concentrating on in-service training for teachers, adult literacy, technical training and curriculum development. We are also maintaining our United Kingdom training programme for all four countries.

Know-how Fund

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds have been allocated to the know-how fund for eastern European countries; and if he will give details of the relevant countries and activities.

Mrs. Chalker: The know-how fund currently covers Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania —as well as the countries of the former Soviet Union. The total allocation up to the end of this financial year is some £48 million, for activities designed to promote the transition to a market economy and a plural democracy. Details of individual projects were placed in the Libraries of the House on 13 January 1992.

Russian Bankers and Financiers

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money has been allocated to the know-how fund for training of Russian bankers and financiers.

Mrs. Chalker: The know-how fund has already committed £158,000 to support training for bankers and financiers in Moscow and St Petersburg. Further projects are in preparation.

In addition, up to 1,000 Russians are to be given training in the banking and finance sector in Britain under an initiative which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer recently announced would be worth £8 million.

WALES

Part-ownership Schemes

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total cost to date of setting up, publicising and administering the flexi-ownership or rents into mortgage schemes in Wales; and how many tenants have so far acquired part-ownership of their homes under this scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Development Board for Rural Wales—(DBRW)—has dealt with 299 inquiries. To date, there have been 52 completed sales. About £10,000 was incurred by the Department and the DBRW in setting up the scheme and £14,000 on publicity. The DBRW has spent some £40,000 on administration costs.

Inmos Ltd

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the sums of public money given in grants or loans to Inmos Ltd or SGS Thomson during the past five years.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department has made regional development grant payments in respect of the Newport plants of Inmos Ltd, as follows:

	£
25 March 1987	48,761
1 June 1988	78,469
15 June 1988	142,097
19 May 1988	24,007
25 November 1988	54,792
9 January 1989	27,174
27 January 1989	65,147

	£
16 February 1989	32,354
17 February 1989	29,759
10 May 1989	38,314
6 July 1989	44,108
17 October 1990	447,838

In addition, while there were no offers of regional selective assistance during this period, an instalment of £874,000 was paid on 21 December 1987 under the terms of an offer made in 1984.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cost of ballots of parents held under section 61 of the Education Act 1988; for which schools he has required a fresh ballot to be held as a result of his guidance not being followed; and in each case what was the reason and who paid the cost of each ballot.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The total cost of ballots of parents held under the Education Reform Act is £8,720·47. No fresh ballots have been necessary.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what applications have been received from grant-maintained schools for special purpose grant-restructuring; and in each case *(a)* how many posts have been affected and *(b)* what grant has been paid.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Grant-maintained schools have been invited to apply for special purpose grant for restructuring. No claims have been received to date.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many copies have been distributed and, in each case, at what cost of all the editions of the booklets *(a)* "School Governors, How to Become a Grant-maintained School," *(b)* "Grant-maintained Schools, Questions Parents Ask" and *(c)* "Grant-maintained Schools, What it Means for Staff."

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is as follows:

(a) 7,000 costing £4,770·35;
(b) 250 produced at minimal cost by the Department; and
(c) copies of the staff booklet will be distributed shortly.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for each of the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91, what have been the individual levels of *(a)* relief from liability for rates, *(b)* special purpose grant (VAT) and *(c)* annual maintenance grant for each grant-maintained school.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There were no grant-maintained schools in Wales for the years in question.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what applications have been received from grant-maintained schools for capital grant and what has been the level of grant approved in each case; and what has been the average capital allocation per pupil in the grant-maintained sector and the average capital expenditure per pupil in the local education authority-maintained sector.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Grant-maintained schools in Wales have been invited to apply for capital grant. No applications have been received to date. In 1989-90, the latest date for which the information is available, the average capital expenditure per pupil in the local education authority maintained sector was £87.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been *(a)* the maximum possible and *(b)* the actual level of transitional grant in respect of each grant-maintained school; and for what purposes the approved expenditure was incurred.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The maximum amount available under the transitional grant arrangements is £60,000. Cwmcarn grant-maintained school and Bishop Vaughan Catholic comprehensive school are eligible to claim up to £39,900 and £57,300 respectively.

The grant is available to cover costs incurred by prospective governing bodies in preparing for grant-maintained status, such as advertising, office equipment, computers and administration.

Alcohol Officers

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many county development officer posts have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* appointed in Wales, to date; and if he will list the counties or district health authority areas where a county development officer for alcohol services has been appointed and the date of first appointment in each case.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The provision of county development officer posts has been approved in every county in Wales. To date the only counties to make an appointment are Clwyd and Gwynedd, who made a joint appointment on 2 September 1991.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he decided to create or support the creation of county development officers for the co-ordination of alcohol services in Welsh counties.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The decision to create county development officer posts was taken following the submission for bids for financial support in 1991-92.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* granted by his Department to each county in Wales to fund county development officers for alcohol services in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93, respectively.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Funding for county development officers was first provided in 1991-92 financial year. No fixed amount has been allocated to each county as they are pursuing differing arrangements, to meet specific local needs. A total of £28,812 has been allocated for the joint Clwyd/Gwynedd development officer appointment. Provisional allocation of £21,421, £24,700 and £11,452 have been made for development officers in Dyfed, Gwent and South Glamorgan respectively. Details of the other appointments have yet to be finalised. The funding is recurring for future years.

Agriculture Grants

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums were paid out by each of his divisional offices for each *(a)* agricultural subsidy and *(b)* grant scheme to farmers in (i) 1990 and (ii) 1991; and how many agreements were entered into for each grant scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

	Financial Year 1989-90			*Financial Year 1990-91*		
	Caernarfon Divisional Office £	*Carmarthen Divisional Office* £	*Llandrindod Divisional Office* £	*Caernarfon Divisional Office* £	*Carmarthen Divisional Office* £	*Llandrindod Divisional Office* £
Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances	9,741,413	5,681,752	15,635,915	10,049,045	6,062,728	16,070,947
Sheep Annual Premium Scheme	9,567,200	5,466,245	12,688,167	16,443,162	10,052,007	21,251,066
Suckler Cow Premium Scheme	1,972,637	1,267,745	4,459,017	2,707,881	2,263,051	4,811,092
Farm Capital Grants	2,510,000	3,427,000	3,487,000	2,671,000	3,782,000	4,329,000
Farm Woodland Scheme	3,890	nil	3,336	10,582	4,997	7,006
Milk (Community Outgoers Scheme)	23,262	41,298	2,220	23,262	41,298	2,220
Farm Diversification Grant Scheme	51,671	138,508	122,837	75,736	133,074	194,986
Farm Diversification Marketing and Feasibility Grant Scheme	nil	1,100	1,340	2,129	3,298	5,081
Set-Aside Scheme	11,251	67,613	49,699	25,461	103,437	102,579

The Cambrian Mountains environmentally sensitive area straddles the Carmarthen and Llandrindod divisional office boundaries. The Lleyn ESA falls entirely within the Caernarfon divisional office area.

The information is as follows:

	Financial year 1989-90	*Financial year 1990-91*
Carmarthen/Llandrindod Divisional Offices	477,827	597,605
Caernarfon Divisional Office	227,661	284,102

Agreement were entered into as follows:

	Financial Year 1989-90			*Financial Year 1990-91*		
	Caernarfon Divisional Office	*Carmarthen Divisional Office*	*Llandrindod Divisional Office*	*Caernarfon Divisional Office*	*Carmarthen Divisional Office*	*Llandrindod Divisional Office*
Farm Capital Grant Plans	74	88	276	110	97	240
Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme	154	32	72	39	25	45
Farm Diversification Grant Scheme Plans including Marketing and Feasibility Plans	23	55	40	23	72	39
Set-Aside Scheme	3	7	4	1	10	4

Art and Music

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has considered the representations on the proposals for art and music in the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend issued for consultation last August proposals for music and art in the national curriculum. The consultation period ended on 1 November last year. He has considered very carefully the representations which he has received and, in particular, the views of the Curriculum Council for Wales which has a statutory duty to advise him on matters relating to the national curriculum in Wales.

In the light of the council's advice and the representations he has received, he has published today for consultation draft orders with associated documents setting out attainment targets and programme of study for art and music in the nation curriculum for pupils aged five to 14, as he is required to do by section 21(3) of the Education Reform Act 1988. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

The period for consultation on the draft orders will end on 9 March. My right hon. Friend intends to make the final orders in April 1992 in good time for schools to begin teaching national curriculum art and music to pupils aged five, seven and 11 from the following autumn. The draft orders apply to Wales. My right hon. Friend has already published draft orders for England on 27 January.

Infant Deaths

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, columns *51-52*, what pilot studies his Department is doing to test the feasibility of the proposals for the confidential inquiries into stillbirths and deaths in infancy set out in the report published on 2 July 1991; and whether the results of the pilot studies will be ready in time to be taken into account in finalising plans for the inquiries themselves.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* The working group on confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy, set up by the Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health, gave advice about how the inquiry should proceed. That advice was based on experience gained from locally based enquiries and did not recommend pilot studies.

THE ARTS

London Theatres

33. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he next expects to pay an official visit to a London theatre; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: As Arts Minister, I am in the thoroughly enviable business of being able to combine business and pleasure, and regularly visit London theatres. I can assure my hon. Friend that I have every intention of continuing to enjoy this pleasurable state of affairs. In the last two weeks I have visited the King's Head theatre and the Almeida theatre in Islington.

Northern Theatres

34. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister for the Arts which theatres he has visited in the north of England in the last 12 months.

Mr. Renton: I visited the northern region twice last year, when I saw some of the excellent arts organisations that are based in the northern region, including the Cleveland Arts Project, the Beamish Open Air museum and the Lang art gallery. I should be pleased to visit theatres when I am next in the region.

Art Treasure Thefts

37. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on actions by national museums and galleries in relation to stolen art treasures.

Mr. Renton: Our museums and galleries comply with a voluntary code of practice under which they agree not to acquire an object unless satisfied that it has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin, or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned, in violation of that country's laws. This includes objects originating in the United Kingdom. I am not aware of any instances where this code of practice has been broken. However, we are currently considering, with our European Community partners, a draft directive from the Commission on the restitution of illegally exported cultural objects.

Artistic Heritage

38. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions he has had over measures to protect the United Kingdom's artistic heritage from export; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Following the reviewing committee's recent report to me, I have held discussions with the reviewing committee and with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves), with the chairman of the National Art Collections Fund and with representatives of the Historic Houses Association. I have asked for representations on this important question to reach me by the end of March.

Museum Charges

Mr. Moate: To ask the Minister for the Arts what is the Government's policy on charges for museums.

Mr. Renton: Unlike the stated intentions of the Opposition I leave it to the national museums for which I am responsible to decide whether to charge for entry. Charging has added useful revenue to museum budgets which has enabled widely successful exhibitions to be mounted.

British Library

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will meet the chairman of the British library to discuss funding.

Mr. Renton: I regularly meet the chairman of the British library. Our discussions include the library's resources and other matters of interest to the board.

Works of Art (Export Licences)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts, pursuant to his answer, on the subject of export licences for works of art, of 21 January, *Official Report*, columns *119-22*, whether a drawing by Poussin was jointly acquired by the Ashmolean and Fitzwilliam museums as stated in the answer, or solely by the Ashmolean museum as stated in his Department's typescript communication to the hon. Member for Warley, East; and why the customary specification of the acquiring institution was omitted in the case of the refusal of an export licence in respect of a drawing of a wooded river landscape with fishermen in a boat by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona.

Mr. Renton: I can confirm that the drawing by Poussin, "A wooded landscape with low hills: a view of the Tiber", was acquired solely by the Ashmolean museum. An offer to purchase the drawing by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona, "A wooded river landscape with fishermen in a boat", was made by the British museum, at the recommended price, and was refused by the owner. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry took into account the existence of this valid offer to purchase, in refusing an export licence. The drawing continues to be held by the owner in the United Kingdom.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Investigations

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current basis on which his Department calculate the fees to be paid to inspectors carrying out companies investigations; and what the total sums expended on such fees were in each year since 1985.

Mr. Redwood: In cases where non-departmental inspectors are appointed, fees, both for inspectors and for the grades of support staff assisting them, are calculated on the basis of pre-agreed hourly charge-out rates.

The total amount expended annually on such fees, including vouched disbursements, is shown in the companies annual report, copies of which are in the Library. For ease of reference, the table sets out the figures for each year since 1985:

Year	*Expenditure (£ million)*
1985	0·77
1986	1·29
1986-87	1·53
1987-88	2·50
1988-89	2·90

Year	*Expenditure (£ million)*
1989-90	6·10
1990-91	11·10

Note: Until 1986, the companies annual report was prepared on a calendar year basis. Thereafter, it was produced on a financial year basis. There is, therefore, an overlap in the figures provided for 1986 and for 1986-87 in the table.

Life Offices (Investors' Funds)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who bears the responsibility for investors' funds placed with intermediaries for investment in life offices; what agency regulates these transactions; and what representations he has received on this point.

Mr. Redwood: The holding of client money by investment businesses under the Financial Services Act is the subject of regulations which are a matter for the Securities and Investments Board.

Breathing Apparatus

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what date he expects *(a)* to announce the setting up of approved inspection bodies to certify United Kingdom manufactured breathing apparatus to comply with the EC directive under article 100A and *(b)* to publish draft regulations for consultation.

Mr. Leigh: There is nothing that I can usefully add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 24 January 1992, *Official Report*, column *400*.

Romania

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance is currently made available by his Department specifically to assist British companies to obtain and fulfil contracts to supply goods and services to Romania.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 30 January 1992]:* A range of services is available under the enterprise initiative including support for outward missions and participation in overseas trade fairs, general information on the markets and answers to specific questions about market opportunities. The services are available through the Romanian section of my Department or our network of regional offices.

Export Credits Guarantee Department cover is not available for medium-term business—that is, on credit terms of two years or more—for Romania, but the position is currently under review.

Short-term cover is available from the private sector.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement of the reasons why Export Credits Guarantee Department cover is not available for British exports to Romania.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 30 January 1992]* The availability of ECGD medium-term export credit cover is dependent on assessment of a country's capacity to repay its debts. Romania's International Monetary Fund programme identifies a significant financing gap in the country's balance of payments. The EC has agreed to fund 50 per cent. of this gap but, thus far, the aggregate amount pledged by other donor countries has fallen well short of the remaining 50 per cent.

There have also been a number of very significant changes in the economic and political situation in Romania during the last year. These have also had to be taken into account in deciding whether to resume cover.

Now that the position is becoming clearer and more international support for Romania's balance of payments is becoming available the provision of ECGD cover is under active review.

Mr. Nicholson Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the size of contracts available to British exporters wishing to supply goods and services to Romania.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 30 January 1992]:]* Information on which to base a comprehensive assessment is not available.

Patents Office

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to issue new guidelines to the Patents Office to assist in the screening of applications to foreign patent offices for information prejudicial to the safety of the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 30 January 1992]:* I have no plans to issue new guidelines to the Patents Office. There are long-established procedures for screening applications which may have a bearing on the defence of the realm and the comptroller of the office is also required under the Patents Act 1977 to have regard to issues of public safety.

CIVIL SERVICE

Scottish Graduates

43. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will carry out a survey into the proportion of graduates of Scottish universities recruited into the higher grades of the civil service.

Mr. Renton: No. All recruitment to the civil service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.

Unions (Ministerial Meetings)

45. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what meetings he has had so far this year with union representatives from London branches of the civil service unions.

Mr. Renton: I meet representatives from civil service trade unions from time to time to discuss a variety of issues.

Senior Civil Servants

47. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will consider the establishment of a system for civil servants to appear before appropriate Committees of the House of Commons, prior to their confirmation in a senior civil service post.

Mr. Renton: No. The present arrangements for appointment on merit are efficient, impartial, well tried and have commanded the support of all parties over many years. I see no reason to change to a system of Committee hearings which has not been conspicuously successful elsewhere.

Civil Service Morale

48. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what new initiatives he has to improve morale in the civil service.

Mr. Renton: Our aim is to have an efficient, effective and well-motivated civil service. Managers in Departments and agencies continually work to achieve this.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Management Costs

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage has been attributed to management costs of the funds spent in each of the last five years by *(a)* each of the education and library boards, *(b)* each of the health and social services boards and *(c)* the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

Education and Library Boards

Board	1986-87 Per cent.	1987-88 Per cent.	1988-89 Per cent.	1989-90 Per cent.	1990-91 Per cent.
Belfast	9·67	10·83	10·83	11·03	10·70
North-Eastern	8·50	8·77	9·43	9·59	9·77
South-Eastern	10·45	10·64	10·92	11·17	11·29
Southern	8·31	8·95	9·98	10·26	10·50
Western	8·69	9·00	9·76	9·97	10·37

Health and Social Services Boards

Board	1986-87 Per cent.	1987-88 Per cent.	1988-89 Per cent.	1989-90 Per cent.	1990-91 Per cent.
Northern	5·85	5·54	5·56	5·88	6·06
Southern	5·08	4·88	4·49	5·14	5·83
Eastern	4·51	4·63	4·70	4·95	5·28
Western	4·63	4·77	4·92	5·35	6·01

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Board	1986-87 Per cent.	1987-88 Per cent.	1988-89 Per cent.	1989-90 Per cent.	[1]1990-91 Per cent.
Housing Executive	7·7	8·2	8·5	9·7	10·7

[1] Estimated.

Terrorism

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table indicating the total number of deaths due to terrorism that have occurred between 1968 and the present day in Northern Ireland; and if he will give the figures available to him for those killed outside Northern Ireland as a result of the Province's security situation.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information available on deaths resulting from the security situation in Northern Ireland is set out in the table:

Deaths resulting from security situation in Northern Ireland

	Northern Ireland	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland[1]	Mainland Europe[2]
1968	0	0	0	—
1969	13	0	0	—
1970	25	0	3	—
1971	174	0	3	—
1972	467	7	4	—
1973	250	2	6	—
1974	216	45	37	—
1975	247	10	7	—
1976	297	2	4	—
1977	112	0	4	—
1978	81	0	1	—
1979	113	1	6	2
1980	76	0	4	2
1981	101	3	1	0
1982	97	11	2	0
1983	77	6	4	0
1984	64	5	1	0
1985	54	0	4	0
1986	61	0	0	0
1987	93	0	6	0
1988	93	1	1	7
1989	62	11	1	4
1990	76	3	0	3
1991	94	3	1	0
[3]1992	13	0	0	0
	2,956	110	100	18

[1] Some eight persons killed or believed to have been killed close to the border in the Republic of Ireland are excluded from these figures, and have been included in Northern Ireland statistics.

[2] Information not available prior to 1979.

[3] As at 22 January.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table indicating the number of injuries due to terrorism that have occurred between 1968 and the present day in Northern Ireland; and if he will give the figures available to him for those injured outside Northern Ireland as a result of the Province's security situation.

Dr. Mawhinney: The table provides the information available about the numbers of injuries caused to persons in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and the rest of Europe, excluding the Republic of Ireland, which are believed to be associated with the security situation in Northern Ireland. Such information is not available in respect of the Republic of Ireland.

Injuries resulting from the security situation in Northern Ireland

	Northern Ireland	*Great Britain*	*Mainland Europe*[1]
1968	379	0	—
1969	765	0	—
1970	811	0	—
1971	2,592	0	—
1972	4,876	15	—
1973	2,651	357	—
1974	2,398	452	—
1975	2,474	232	—
1976	2,729	104	—
1977	1,387	1	—
1978	985	11	—
1979	875	4	0
1980	801	5	2
1981	1,350	42	0
1982	525	59	0
1983	510	96	0
1984	866	30	0
1985	916	0	0
1986	1,450	0	0
1987	1,130	0	31
1988	1,047	8	16
1989	959	24	8
1990	906	56	0
1991	962	40	0
1992[2]	—	0	0
	33,382+	1,536	57

[1] Not available prior to 1979.

[2] Information not yet available.

Redundancies, South Down

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many redundancies in factories in Ballynahinch and Killyleagh have been reported in the last year; and what plans he has to introduce enterprise zones into the constituency of South Down.

Mr. Needham: The Department of Economic Development receives notification of redundancies involving 10 or more employees at any specific establishment. Since 1 January 1991, a total of 226 redundancies have been reported at factories located in Ballynahinch and Killyleagh.

In association with the International Fund for Ireland the Government are embarking on a number of initiatives aimed at enhancing social and economic conditions in South Down. Enterprise zones which are targeted on areas of large scale industrial dereliction do not form part of this regeneration strategy.

Environmental Pollution

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met *(a)* senior industrialists, *(b)* the Director of the Confederation of British Industry, and *(c)* leaders of the trade union movement to discuss measures to reduce environmental pollution in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet a wide range of people connected with industry in Northern Ireland and environmental issues are often discussed. There have not, however, been any meetings specifically to examine measures to reduce pollution.

Fair Employment Commission

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will state the number of *(a)* Protestants and *(b)* Roman Catholics in the Fair Employment Commission staff, at the latest available date, for staff in (i) executive posts, (ii) operations posts and (iii) support posts.

Mr. Needham: The information requested, as at 1 January 1992, is as follows:

	Protestant	*Roman Catholic*
Operational staff	23	19
Support staff	8	10

Further disaggregation of the data could infringe the confidentiality provisions of fair employment legislation by disclosing the religious belief of indentifiable individuals.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current length of time taken to process attendance allowance application forms; and what action will be taken to reduce the time.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Supplementary Benefit Appeals

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional arrangements will be made urgently to resolve the number of outstanding appeals in respect of supplementary benefit.

Mr. Hanley: Within the last few months there have been around 22,000 appeals against the award of supplementary benefit, all of them made outside the normal time limit for appeal. The president of the Independent Appeal Tribunal Service is responsible for hearing appeals and he has made arrangements to have them passed to the chairmen for independent ajudication at additional sessions.

Nursery Care

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide an estimate of the money spent by education and library boards in Northern Ireland in 1990-91 and 1991-92 on providing education and nursery care for three and four-year-olds.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

	1990-91 (outturn)	*1991-92[1] (estimate)*
	£000s	£000s
Nursery Schools	2,922	6,901

[1] 1991-92 figures include estimated expenditure on teachers' salaries; in 1990-91 these costs were met by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Expenditure on nursery classes in primary schools is included in primary schools expenditure and is not available separately.

Life Sentences

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners were serving *(a)* discretionary life sentences and *(b)* mandatory life sentences as of 31 December, specifying the numbers of prisoners in each category who had served more than 10 years by that date and the length of time in excess of 10 years served by any such prisoners.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers which I gave to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) on 29 January, *Official Report*, columns *607-8*.

Executive Agencies

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will announce any further progress under the "next steps" initiative in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am pleased to announce that, following a thorough feasibility study, the Government have decided that an executive agency should be set up within the Department of Finance and Personnel to carry out the work of the Valuation and Lands Office.

The detailed planning for agency status is already under way and the target launch date is 1 April 1993.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled Workers

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the disabled work force hold professional or managerial positions compared with the percentage for non-disabled workers.

Mr. Jackson: I regret that this information is not available.

Youth Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average unit price in real terms of a place on youth training in 1983 and what it is now.

Mr. Jackson: The average unit price of a youth training scheme place in 1983 was £88 per trainee per week at current price levels. The average unit price of a youth training place is £51 per trainee week in 1991-92. The reduction in the unit price reflects the increased level of financial contributions from employers and also the Government's determination to obtain best value for taxpayers' money.

Civil Unrest (Compensation)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people claiming compensation under the scheme of compensation for loss of employment through civil unrest were refused compensation in each year since 1970 because they had not been employed for more than two years; and what percentage they represent of *(a)* the number claiming compensation and *(b)* the number of those workers whose claims were disallowed.

Mr. Needham: It is only possible to provide the information requested from 1987 as relevant records prior to that year have not been retained. The available information is given in the table.

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Number of applications disallowed because applicants had not been employed for more than two years	4	—	3	3	1
Expressed as a percentage of applications received	13	—	11	19	7
Expressed as a percentage of total applications disallowed	50	—	38	60	50

Unemployment

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people became unemployed during 1991 in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jackson: In the 12 months ending December 1991, 4,423,260 people became claimant unemployed, compared to 3,721,914 who left unemployment, leading to a net rise of 701,346 over the year, on the unadjusted basis.

The flow figures will include some people who had more than one spell of unemployment during the year.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what training will be given to disablement resettlement officers to enable them to advise individual claimants about their entitlement to disability working allowance and its impact on their finances.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the policy of Employment Service agencies in respect of acting in competition with the private recruitment sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Government have long been a strong supporter of the private recruitment sector. This sector has a distinctive and important role to play, and there should not be any unfair competition from the public employment service.

Employment Service

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the main aims and objectives of the Employment Service.

Mr. Jackson: The aims and objectives of the Employment Service are set out in the Employment Service agency framework document, a copy of which can be found in the Library.

Jobcentres

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps his Department has taken to ensure that jobcentres build up sufficient caseloads of clients' skills to facilitate the matching of the unemployed to appropriate vacancies; what priority is accorded to matching in his Department's activities in helping unemployed people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if it is the intention of the Government to level out prices in order to bring about a fixed unit price for training and enterprise councils nationwide; and what consideration he has given to the variation across the United Kingdom in terms of *(a)* the level of employed status, *(b)* the number of clients with special needs, *(c)* the difference in the rate of unemployment and *(d)* the differences in the availability of work employment placements.

Mr. Jackson: The Government have no intention of bringing about a fixed unit price for training and enterprise councils nationwide. Unit prices for training and enterprise councils take account of local variations in their labour markets, including the factors listed by the hon. Member.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what basis he decided to encourage an increase in the number of national vocational qualifications to meet the CBI targets and other quality measures without making a corresponding increase in the funding of TECS.

Mr. Jackson: Our priority is to encourage the development of the highly skilled and flexible work force the economy needs. On the Government's behalf, we have therefore welcomed the CBI's targets, since they are based on nationally recognised qualifications and have been set by employers, who have the main responsibility for taking action to achieve them. We have also invited TECs to take the lead in their local communities in promoting action by employers and others to work towards the targets. TECs will be given the funding to do the tasks the Government have asked them to do.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how he intends to fund the training of new people entering the employment register within the lower total budget available to training and enterprise councils for 1992-93.

Mr. Jackson: Planned spending on YT and ET in 1992-93 will increase. In addition, resources for a range of measures delivered by the Employment Service for unemployed people have also been increased. Detailed figures will be published shortly in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1991-1992 to 1992-1994" for the Employment Department group.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to increse the money within TECs' training budgets.

Mr. Jackson: The Department is currently negotiating business plans for 1992-93 with all TECs. The Government plan to spend £2·8 billion on training, enterprise and vocational education programmes this year, which is more than was spent last year.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the budget for all the TECs in the United Kingdom for the years *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93.

Mr. Jackson: The table shows the TEC operational budgets for 1991-92. Information for Scottish local enterprise companies is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to provide. Budgets are for the period of TEC operation only and vary in the periods they cover because of the differing operational dates of TECs.

The TEC budgets for 1992-93 are still subject to negotiation.

TEC	*Allocation £ million*
South East	
Essex (23 July 1990)	29·162
Hampshire (17 September 1990)	31·903
Heart of England (17 September 1990)	10·733
Hertfordshire (30 April 1990)	19·527
Isle of Wight (15 October 1990)	4·123
Kent (12 November 1990)	32·172
Milion Keynes and North Bucks (17 September 1990)	6·488
Surrey (1 April 1991)	14·070
Sussex (1 April 1991)	25·984
Thames Valley Enterprise (30 April 1990)	19·784
London	
AZTEC (12 November 1990)	10·742
CENTEC (16 September 1991)	11·951
CILNTEC (14 October 1991)	8·124
LETEC (1 April 1991)	27·618
North London (16 September 1991)	9·690
North West London (16 September 1991)	5·625
SOLOTEC (1 April 1991)	18·555
South Thames (27 May 1991)	20·510
West London (16 September 1991)	8·945
South West	
Avon (1 April 1991)	29·263
Devon and Cornwall (30 April 1990)	52·475
Dorset (30 April 1990)	15·488
Gloucester (7 January 1991)	13·010
Somerset (23 July 1990)	13·259
Wiltshire (1 April 1991)	12·766
West Midlands	
Birmingham (12 November 1990)	46·456
Central England (1 April 1991)	10·975
Coventry (17 September 1990)	25·768

TEC	*Allocation £ million*
Dudley (1 April 1991)	11·203
Hereford and Worcester (1 April 1991)	10·141
Sandwell (1 April 1991)	11·427
Shropshire (1 April 1991)	13·460
Staffordshire (15 October 1990)	34·627
Walsall (15 October 1990)	23·544
Wolverhampton (1 April 1991)	11·564
East Midlands and Anglia	
Leicester (1 April 1991)	26·339
Northamptonshire (1 April 1991)	12·852
Lincolnshire (1 April 1991)	8·174
Greater Nottingham (1 April 1991)	21·420
North Nottingham (25 June 1960)	16·965
South Derbyshire (7 January 1991)	17·607
North Derbyshire (1 April 1991)	11·544
Norfolk and Waveney (12 November 1990)	22·888
Suffolk (12 November 1990)	14·243
Bedfordshire (1 April 1991)	12·137
Greater Peterborough (4 February 1991)	8·174
CAMBSTEC (4 February 1991)	6·362
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Leeds (15 October 1990)	22·497
North Yorkshire (25 June 1990)	17·006
Bradford (7 January 1991)	18·696
Calderdale/Kirklees (3 April 1990)	20·592
Wakefield (7 January 1991)	12·231
Barnsley and Doncaster (7 January 1991)	25·705
Sheffield (1 October 1990)	24·206
Rotherham (30 July 1990)	12·127
Humberside (2 April 1991)	37·537
North West	
Bolton and Bury (15 October 1990)	12·9
CEWTEC (1 April 1991)	21·0
Cumbria (30 April 1990)	17·3
ELTEC (29 May 1990)	17·3
LAWTEC (1 April 1991)	26·3
Manchester (12 November 1990)	38·5
METROTEC (23 July 1990)	10·5
Oldham (30 April 1990)	8·6
QUALITEC (1 April 1991)	9·3
Rochdale (30 April 1990)	6·5
S and E Cheshire (9 April 1990)	10·9
Stockport and High Peak (20 August 1990)	9·7
Merseyside (24 June 1991)	41·6
NORMID (24 June 1991)	11·9
Northern	
Teeside (30 April 1990)	34·565
Tyneside (30 April 1990)	45·908
Wearside (30 April 1990)	21·484
Durham (1 October 1990)	34·380
Northumberland (17 September 1990)	15·639
Wales	
Gwent (4 February 1991)	18·4
North East Wales (17 September 1990)	13·6
North West Wales (4 February 1991)	13·6
Mid Glamorgan (23 July 1990)	21·1
Powys (2 April 1991)	4·8
South Glamorgan (4 February 1991)	14·1
West Wales (23 July 1990)	31·5

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how his Department uses business plans prepared by local TECs.

Mr. Jackson: The business plan sets out the TEC's planned activity for the year ahead. It forms the basis of any negotiations with the TEC on matters such as levels of resources. The approved business plan represents what the TEC agrees to deliver under its contract with us.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will remove restrictions imposed within the operating agreement for local training and enterprise councils which meet the needs of their own areas.

Mr. Jackson: We are satisfied that the operating agreement with training and enterprise councils gives them the flexibility to arrange provision to meet the specific needs of their local areas.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration he has given to transferring the remit of training and enterprise councils back to his Department.

Mr. Jackson: We are very satisfied with the way TECs are discharging their training and enterprise remit, and have no plans to transfer their responsibilities back to the Department.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what priority he gives to the business plan of local training and enterprise councils as compared with other main programmes for the unemployed.

Mr. Jackson: The activities set out in the training and enterprise councils' business plans are an important part of the wide range of help given to unemployed people through the Department.

Training

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the average unit cost for *(a)* youth training and *(b)* employment training and the expected monetary contribution towards this from employers both for 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Jackson: In 1991-92, the average cost per filled place per annum is £[illegible] for YT and £6,100 for ET, including allowances. We are not able to make the 1992-93 figures public until negotiations between the Employment Department, and TECs for 1992-93 contracts are complete, as to do so would prejudice the Department's negotiating position.

Employer contributions are estimated to be £627 per filled place per annum on YT and £420 per filled place per annum on ET in 1991-92. We expect an increase in employer contributions in 1992-93.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for what reasons it was decided not to pay trainee allowance out of employment training but to include an allowance of £35 per week in the youth training unit price.

Mr. Jackson: Youth training must receive training allowances of at least £29·50 per week and £35 per week for 16 and 17-year-old trainees respectively. These allowances are paid directly to trainees by training providers from the funding available from training and enterprise councils.

Employment training trainees receive their previous benefit entitlement plus a £10 premium. Due to the direct link with benefit, employment training trainees are paid their training allowance by the Employment Service through the benefit payment computer system. It is therefore not necessary to include allowances in the employment training funding given to training and enterprise councils and providers.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his policy in this year's round of negotiation on reducing the youth training price to a figure below that of employment training.

Mr. Jackson: The prices paid to training and enterprise councils for youth training and employment training are set independently of each other and reflect among other things the differing nature of the programmes.

Local Initiative Fund

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for what reasons the local initiative was reduced from £1·15 per capita to £0·45.

Mr. Jackson: The per capita allowance is just one element of money made available to training and enterprise councils through the local initiative fund. The total amount available for training and enterprise councils to spend through the fund in 1992-93 will be higher than their expected expenditure in 1991-92.

TRANSPORT

Cradlewell Bypass

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the reasons for the postponement of the Cradlewell bypass project by his transport policies and plans Department in its settlement with the city of Newcastle upon Tyne; when the new date for a commencement of his project is planned; and whether the public safety implications of a consequential further postponement of the renovation of the listed Armstrong bridge across Jesmond dene have been taken into account.

Mr. Chope: The start date for Cradlewell bypass is a matter for the Newcastle city council.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicle owners in 1991 renewed road tax on those vehicles after a period during which the vehicle was alleged to have been off the road.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Most breaks in licensing occur because the vehicle is in the hands of a dealer for sale.

Railway Services (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has held during the past 12 months with his EC counterparts with a view to upgrading railway services through Wales, as part of his transport infrastructure links between Ireland and the rest of Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I last discussed these issues with the Irish Minister of Transport and Tourism, Mr. Lyons, on 6 July 1991. At last December's EC Council of Ministers, the Commission tabled a paper on European transport infrastructure networks, which will be the subject of future discussions between member states.

Electrically Powered Passenger Road Vehicles

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what monitoring he undertakes of advances in the development of electrically powered passenger road vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My Department's Transport and Road Research Laboratory is currently reviewing national and international research and experience in the use of alternative fuels and engines for road vehicles. This review will encompass electric vehicles and battery technology.

In addition to the TRRL review, my Department continues to keep abreast of electric vehicle developments worldwide, and I welcome the continuing efforts by manufacturers to develop advanced batteries and more competitive electric vehicles.

Disabled People (Parking)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will initiate discussions with representatives of the London boroughs association and other relevant bodies to examine the provision of increased parking spaces for registered disabled persons in the outer London boroughs.

Mr. Chope: No. But I shall ensure that a reference to this is included in the forthcoming parking guidance being issued under the Road Traffic Act 1991. This guidance will be subject to consultation with London local authorities.

Offshore Standby Vessels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many emergency or standby vessels working in the offshore oil and gas industries have failed their inspections in each of the past five years; how many of those deemed unsatisfactory were removed from this work in each of the past five years; what other sanctions were imposed upon the owners of such vessels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Annual surveys of standby vessels are carried out by the Department's marine surveyors to establish that the vessel satisfies the Merchant Shipping Regulations and the specific standards required by the standby vessel code. All defects and items of non-compliance are brought to the attention of the shipowners together with details of what repairs/modifications are required before a certificate of survey can be issued. Owners may withdraw vessels if the cost of repairs or modifications renders the further use of the vessel uneconomic.

Details of the number of vessels withdrawn by their owners in each of the past five years are not available to the Department.

Other sanctions which have been applied to standby vessels include withdrawal of certificates pending repair, and delay to vessels until repairs are completed and approved by the surveyor.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the frequency and duration of inspections of standby vessels operating in the offshore oil and gas industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Standby safety vessels operating in the offshore oil and gas industries are subject to annual surveys under Merchant Shipping Regulations and for reissue of the certificate of compliance with the "Code for the Assessment of the Suitability of Standby Vessels Attending Offshore Installations". This is the non-statutory document which sets out guidance on the standards to be achieved and equipment to be carried on such vessels.

The duration of such surveys depends upon the condition of the vessel when presented for survey and the extent and type of any defects discovered during the survey.

Such vessels may also be subjected to random inspections during the currency of their certificates.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* types, *(b)* ages and *(c)* names of emergency or standby vessels currently working in the offshore oil and gas industries.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is as follows:

Name	*Year of build*	*Type of vessel*
Aberdonian	1977	Standby/Rescue[4]
Alexandra Tide	1974	Anchor/Tug Supply
Anegada	1962	Standby/Rescue[1]
Atlantic Defender	1979	Supply Ship
Barnsley	1960	Standby/Rescue[1]
Barra Supplier	1984	Anchor/Tug Supply
Black Isle	1973	Standby/Rescue[3]
Black Watch	1981	Research Vessel
Blue Flame 1	1976	Pipe Laying Vessel
Breydon Eider	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Challenger	1964	Ex Hospital Ship
Britannia Champion	1980	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Chieftain	1973	Standby/Rescue[2]
Britannia Cobra	1978	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Crusader	1976	Supply Ship
Britannia Endeavour	1975	Supply Ship
Britannia Fury	1972	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Gazelle	1978	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Harvester	1972	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Knight	1976	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Monarch	1973	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Stallion	1978	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Venturer	1965	Research Vessel
Britannia Vixen	1978	Standby/Rescue[1]
Britannia Warrior	1973	Standby/Rescue[1]
British Claymore	1982	Anchor/Tug Supply
Cam Cheetah	1959	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Civet	1960	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Cougar	1958	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Defender	1983	Standby/Rescue[2]
Cam Guardian	1970	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Jaguar	1957	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Lynx	1960	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Observer	1953	Standby/Rescue[3]
Cam Panther	1958	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Protector	1983	Standby/Rescue
Cam Puma	1966	Standby/Rescue
Cam Ranger	1983	Standby/Rescue
Cam Retriever	1972	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Scout	1956	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Searcher	1971	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Seeker	1967	Standby/Rescue[4]
Cam Sentinel	1982	Standby/Rescue
Cam Sprite	1971	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Valiant	1939	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Vanguard	1955	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Venturer	1973	Standby/Rescue
Cam Viceroy	1958	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Victor	1969	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Viking	1972	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Viscount	1971	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Voyager	1957	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Vulcan	1958	Standby/Rescue[1]
Cam Zebra	1960	Standby/Rescue[1]
Colne Kestrel	1966	Standby/Rescue[1]
Colne Phantom	1965	Standby/Rescue[1]
Dawn Blazer	1965	Survey
Dawn Gem	1958	Standby/Rescue[1]
Dawn Monarch	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
Dawn Saviour	1960	Standby/Rescue[1]
Dawn Shore	1967	Standby/Rescue[1]
Dawn Sky	1967	Survey
Dawn Warbler	1966	Survey
DEA Supporter	1970	Supply Ship
Euan	1936	Standby/Rescue[1]
Exuma	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
Far Centurion	1983	Anchor/Tug Supply
Far Earl	1986	Platform Supply
Far Searcher	1975	Anchor/Tug Supply
Far Seeker	1986	Tug/Supply Ship
Far Sovereign	1982	Platform Supply
Far Stream	1982	Tug/Supply Ship
Grampian City	1976	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Concord	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Dee	1975	Standby/Rescue[3]
Grampian Eagle	1975	Standby/Rescue[2]
Grampian Endeavour	1966	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Explorer	1965	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Falcon	1982	Supply Ship
Grampian Forest	1962	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Freedom	1966	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Harrier	1967	Standby/Rescue[3]
Grampian Highlander	1976	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian King	1959	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Monarch	1968	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Osprey	1937	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Otter	1983	Supply Ship
Grampian Petrel	1959	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Pioneer	1981	Standby/Rescue
Grampian Pride	1981	Standby/Rescue
Grampian Protector	1983	Standby/Rescue
Grampian Quest	1959	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Rose	1949	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Shield	1974	Standby/Rescue[2]
Grampian Sprite	1982	Supply Ship
Grampian Sword	1976	Standby/Rescue[3]
Grampian Viking	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
Grampian Warrior	1977	Standby/Rescue[1]
Hatherleigh	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
Kronbas	1975	Anchor/Tug Supply
Maersk Mariner	1986	Anchor/Tug Supply
Maersk Ranger	1980	Anchor/Tug Supply
Maersk Rover	1982	Anchor/Tug Supply
Maersk Runner	1980	Anchor/Tug Supply
Mary Craig	1959	Standby/Rescue[2]
Normand Skipper	1975	Anchor/Tug Supply
Nova	1969	Standby/Rescue[1]
Oakleigh	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
Putford Achates	1976	Standby/Rescue[1]
Putford Achilles	1973	Supply Ship
Putford Ajax	1976	Supply Ship
Putford Apollo	1975	Standby/Rescue[1]
Putford Falcon	1957	Standby/Rescue[1]
Putford Harrier	1960	Standby/Rescue[1]
Putford Merlin	1962	Standby/Rescue[1]
Putford Osprey	1960	Standby/Rescue[1]
Putford Putrel	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
Putford Skua	1967	Diving Support
Putford Snipe	1969	Tug/Supply Ship
Putford Teal	1969	Standby/Rescue[1]
Putford Tern	1967	Standby/Rescue[1]
Safe Carrier	1968	Supply Ship
Safe Transporter	1971	Supply Ship
Safe Truck	1976	Standby/Rescue[2]
Scott Protector	1984	Standby/Rescue[2]
Sea Sapphire	1973	Anchor/Tug Supply
Seaboard Capella	1968	Standby/Rescue[4]
Seaboard Castor	1941	Standby/Rescue[1]
Seaboard Illustrious	1966	Diving Support
Seaboard Implacable	1964	Standby/Rescue[1]
Seaboard Integrity	1969	Standby/Rescue[1]

Name	*Year of build*	*Type of vessel*
Seaboard Intrepid	1968	Standby/Rescue[1]
Seaboard Invincible	1970	Diving/Support
Seaboard Sapphire	1980	Standby/Rescue[2]
Seaboard Sceptre	1981	Standby/Rescue[2]
Seaboard Sentry	1978	Standby/Rescue[2]
Seaboard Snipe	1972	Supply Ship
Seaboard Sovereign	1982	Standby/Rescue[2]
Seaboard Support	1978	Standby/Rescue[2]
Seaboard Supreme	1981	Standby/Rescue[2]
Seaboard Swallow	1972	Standby/Rescue[2]
Seaboard Swan	1971	Supply Ship
Seaboard Swift	1972	Standby/Rescue[1]
Shetland Service	1973	Anchor/Tug Service
St. Anne	1962	Standby/Rescue[1]
St.Elizabeth	1962	Standby/Rescue[1]
St. Louis	1962	Standby/Rescue[1]
St. Luke	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
St. Patrick	1975	Standby/Rescue[1]
St. Phillip	1975	Standby/Rescue[1]
Stirling Snipe	1982	Supply
Stirling Teal	1982	Supply
Suffolk Conquest	1974	Standby/Rescue[1]
Tempest	1977	Anchor/Handling Tug
Togo	1965	Standby/Rescue[1]
Toisa Conqueror	1976	Anchor/Tug Supply
Toisa Lynx	1983	Anchor/Tug Supply
Toisa Panther	1984	Platform Supply
Toisa Petrel	1983	Tug/Supply Ship
Toisa Puffin	1980	Supply Ship
Toisa Teal	1981	Standby/Rescue[2]
Toisa Tiger	1983	Anchor/Tug Supply
Toisa Widgeon	1981	Standby/Rescue[3]
Umberleigh	1960	Standby/Rescue[1]
Veesea Emerald	1980	Supply Ship
Veesea Hurricane	1975	Tug/Supply Ship
Veesea Sapphire	1977	Supply Ship
Veesea Storm	1975	Supply Ship
Veesea Tempest	1974	Tug/Supply Ship
Veesea Topaz	1978	Supply Ship
Winkleigh	1961	Standby/Rescue[1]
Woodleigh	1960	Standby/Rescue[1]

[1] Ex Fishing Vessel.
[2] Ex Supply Vessel.
[3] Ex Cargo Vessel.
[4] Ex Tug.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new vessels have been introduced into the United Kingdom emergency or standby vessels operating in the offshore oil and gas industries in each of the past three years; how many of these vessels are *(a)* converted vessels or *(b)* custom-built emergency or standby vessels; and how many of the custom-built vessels were built in United Kindom yards.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of vessels certificated for the first time for use in the United Kingdom standby industry in the past three years were eight vessels in 1989, 24 in 1990 and 30 in 1991.

Of these vessels the vast majority, some 61 vessels, were converted for the purpose. Only one was purpose built as a standby vessel and this may not have been directly for the United Kingdom industry but may have previously served as a standby vessel in Norway or elsewhere. No custom-built vessels were constructed in united Kingdom shipyards.

Yachts

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consult the hon. Member for South Hams before he decides on *(a)* a timescale for the implementation of further revisions of the Merchant Shipping (Pleasure Yacht) Regulations 1991 and *(b)* a code of practice for charter yachts.

Mr. McLoughlin: Yes.

Air Routes

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it a condition of granting regulatory approval of the purchase by W. S. Air Inc. of the Philadelphia/London and Baltimore/London routes from Trans World Airlines Inc. that all employees allocated to these routes will be offered transfer terms.

Mr. McLoughlin: The designation of one airline on a route in substitution for another is a matter for the Government of the country concerned, in this case, the United States. Employment arrangements are matters for the companies concerned and their employees, subject to any relevant rules regarding employment protection and transfer which apply under United Kingdom law. They are not matters on which I intervene.

M6

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of plans to widen the M6; when he expects the public consultation process to begin; and when he expects to be able to make a decision.

Mr. Chope: Preparation work is proceeding satisfactorily; public consultation on proposals for the length between junctions 11 and 20 is planned for later this year.

Red Route Network

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria he used in deciding which roads to include in his draft red route network.

Mr. Chope: The main basis for the proposed red route network is the present primary route network with the addition of certain other strategically important roads and a limited network of roads in central London identified as being most important for the movement of traffic within the area.

Vehicle Emissions

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provision he makes for the reporting of smoky emissions from on-road buses and for allowing such vehicles to be called in for immediate testing.

Mr. McLoughlin: Complaints to the Department's traffic area offices about smoky buses are followed up, if sufficient details of the vehicle and the incident are provided, by a letter to the operator. This asks him to have the vehicle checked and to report to the Department on the action taken. If there are persistent complaints about a particular operator or vehicle, the vehicle inspectorate will arrange to visit his premises. This could result in a vehicle being prohibited from use until a defect was rectified.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what current procedures exist for the testing of exhaust emissions of bus fleets.

Mr. McLoughlin: Bus operators are responsible for ensuring that their vehicles comply with the emissions provisions in the Construction and Use Regulations. The density of diesel smoke from buses is checked visually by the vehicle inspectorate at annual roadworthiness tests and also at spot checks at the roadside and at operators' premises.

Policy Unit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the establishment of his transport policy unit in each of the last three years; what are its responsibilities; and if he will list the deregulation initiatives taken.

Mr. Freeman: The staff complement for the transport policy unit was 7½ posts in 1989, 9½ in 1990 and 14 in 1991.

The unit's responsibilities are the co-ordination of cross-modal transport policy issues, especially concerning the environment and safety. Since 1991 it has also had responsibility for deregulation in transport; for liaison with parliamentary Select Committees and for co-ordination of the Department's interests in the legislative programme.

The Government's deregulation initiative was started in 1985, and the areas targeted for review in each Government Department including DTp were set out in the White Paper "Lifting the Burden," Cmnd 9571. Progress with that programme, and subsequent additions to the programme, were set out in "Building Businesses ... not Barriers", Cmnd 9794, published May 1986, and "Releasing Enterprise", Cmnd 512, published November 1988. The programme for 1991 was announced to the House by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Corporate Affairs on 18 December 1990, *Official Report*, columns *99-100*.

The aim of the deregulation initiative is to remove the unnecessary regulation and licensing of business. The Government have, however, no hesitation in retaining or making new regulations where these are needed particularly for safety reasons. For example we are seeking agreement in the EC for improvements in regulatory standards for the safe construction of vehicles. The Department's aim is to review all existing regulations, to ensure that these are not out of date, or overlapping, or so obscure as to be ineffective—and where they are, to abolish them; and, if new regulations are necessary, to make them as unburdensome as possible.

London Underground (Danger Lights)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the latest position concerning London Underground and the railways inspectorate's report on procedures at danger lights.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that this matter will be addressed in a report to be published within the next few weeks by the Health and Safety Executive on the railway inspectorate's inquiries into two separate accidents involving London Underground trains.

British Rail

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning British Rail's proposed reduction of services on the west coast main line; and what plans he has to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss these reductions.

Mr. Freeman: The Department has received a number of representations. The level of service on any particular line is a matter for British Rail.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Statements of Attainment

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which level 6 statements of attainment in GCSE English reading and writing he proposes to forgo to reduce the coursework weighting.

Mr. Eggar: The limits on coursework in GCSE English which my right hon. and learned Friend announced in November allow for up to 20 per cent. of the total marks to be based on coursework in reading and writing combined. Within that it should be possible for the examining groups to devise ways of testing skills, knowledge and understanding across the full range of statements of attainment. It is not necessary that each and every statement of attainment be the subject of examination.

European Year of Elderly People

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans his Department is making for the European year of elderly people and solidarity between the generations in 1993.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has lead responsibility in this area, in conjunction with the Department of Social Security, and I refer my hon. Friend to his reply today. In drawing up plans for the European year, the Department of Health is consulting a wide range of national voluntary and professional bodies, statutory authorities and other relevant Government Departments.

School Pupils

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in rank order the English local education authorities showing *(a)* expenditure per secondary school pupil and *(b)* the proportion of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grade A to C for the most recent year available.

Mr. Eggar: The table shows school-based spending per secondary pupil in financial year 1989-90 and the average percentage of school leavers obtaining five or more grades A, B or C at GCSE in 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90.

	Net institutional expenditure per secondary pupil 1989-90 (£)	*Percentage of leavers with five or more GCSE/0/CSE Grades A-C*	*Rank (passes)*
Inner London	2.745	17·4	92
Waltham Forest	2,490	17·7	91
Ealing	2,345	21·5	82

	Net institutional expenditure per secondary pupil 1989-90 (£)	*Percentage of leavers with five or more GCSE/0/CSE Grades A-C*	*Rank (passes)*
Newham	2,310	14·3	94
Brent	2,225	23·3	75
Barking	2,200	13·6	95
Coventry	2,180	21·3	83
Salford	2,140	24·9	68
Kingston-upon-Thames	2,120	34·2	14
Sandwell	2,115	17·4	92
Liverpool	2,110	20·7	85
Knowsley	2,105	11·6	96
Rochdale	2,050	24·5	70
Hillingdon	2,010	27·3	54
South Tyneside	2,010	26·8	59
Wigan	2,000	34·6	12
Walsall	1,995	25·5	65
Havering	1,990	28·6	46
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,980	22·3	80
Harrow	1,975	44·1	1
Wirral	1,975	32·5	22
Derbyshire	1,975	26·9	57
Wolverhampton	1,975	21·2	84
St. Helens	1,970	22·9	77
Bromley	1,955	31·7	27
Dudley	1,955	28·9	43
Nottinghamshire	1,955	24·7	69
Barnet	1,945	39·0	5
Croydon	1,935	22·9	77
Merton	1,925	28·7	45
Trafford	1,920	32·8	20
Sheffield	1,920	25·9	64
Cleveland	1,915	27·3	54
Hertfordshire	1,900	36·1	10
Leicestershire	1,900	28·4	48
Gateshead	1,865	20·7	85
Stockport	1,860	34·9	11
Bury	1,860	23·1	76
Shopshire	1,855	32·4	23
Redbridge	1,855	25·3	66
Buckinghamshire	1,850	41·2	2
Cumbria	1,845	29·6	39
Sunderland	1,845	24·1	72
Sutton	1,840	37·0	8
Bolton	1,840	31·9	26
Solihull	1,835	33·4	16
Tameside	1,835	29·1	42
Birmingham	1,835	22·7	79
Bexley	1,820	30·2	34
Lancashire	1,820	29·4	41
Suffolk	1,820	26·6	60
Enfield	1,815	31·4	29
Bedfordshire	1,815	27·3	54
Oxfordshire	1,810	29·8	37
Rotherham	1,810	28·6	46
Kirklees	1,810	28·2	49
Norfolk	1,810	27·8	51
Doncaster	1,805	23·6	73
Essex	1,800	30·9	31
Avon	1,800	30·2	34
Barnsley	1,795	26·9	57
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,790	38·0	6
Hampshire	1,790	32·8	20
Staffordshire	1,790	26·6	60
Warwickshire	1,770	30·9	31
East Sussex	1,765	36·5	9
Oldham	1,765	21·7	81
North Yorkshire	1,760	37·6	7
Humberside	1,760	23·4	74
West Sussex	1,745	39·6	4
Somerset	1,745	31·4	29
Gloucestershire	1,735	34·3	13
Berkshire	1,735	32·4	23
Durham	1,735	26·3	63
Cheshire	1,725	33·3	18
Sefton	1,715	33·3	18
Leeds	1,715	24·3	71
Devon	1,710	29·5	40
Cornwall including Scilly	1,700	33·8	15
Wiltshire	1,700	30·1	36
Northamptonshire	1,685	27·8	51
Lincolnshire	1,680	26·6	60
Surrey	1,675	40·7	3
Calderdale	1,665	27·8	51
Northumberland	1,645	33·4	16
Cambridge	1,640	29·8	37
Hereford and Worcester	1,635	32·1	25
Dorset	1,635	31·5	28
Bradford	1,635	17·8	90
Isle of Wight	1,575	28·1	50
Kent	1,570	28·9	43
North Tyneside	n/a	30·3	33
Hounslow	n/a	25·2	67
Wakefield	n/a	20·3	87
Manchester	n/a	20·2	88
Haringey	n/a	19·8	89

Note: **"Per pupil expenditure figures are derived from LEAs' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment and their pupil numbers to the Department of Education and Science. Figures are for 1989-90, the latest year for which actual spending information is available; 'n/a' indicates that a return was not received from the authority. Net institutional expenditure covers spending on salaries and wages, recurrent premises costs, books and equipment, and certain other supplies and services. It excludes spending on LEA administration, home to school transport, school meals and financing costs of capital expenditure."**

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in rank order, by local education authority, the proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds staying on at school or going into full-time education.

Mr. Eggar: Data for 1989-90 were published last year and are available in the Library. Participation rates for 1990-91 will appear in a statistical bulletin in May. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds in Derbyshire *(a)* stayed on at school, *(b)* went into other full-time education or *(c)* received some form of part-time education in 1979, 1986 and the most recent year available.

Mr. Eggar: Participation rates for 16 and 17-year-olds in Derbyshire who stayed on at school or in other full-time and part-time education in 1979, 1986 and 1989 are as follows:

	Percentage of population		
	1979-80	*1986-87*	*1989-90*
Age 16			
School	18	18	21
Full-time further education	17	26	29
Part-time further education	17	17	16
Age 17			
School	13	13	16
Full-time further education	9	17	20
Part-time further education	20	14	15

Truancy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how may categories of absence are set out in the regulations on reporting on truancy; and what pilot survey was carried out of the costs and benefits of requiring these categories.

Mr. Fallon: The Education (Pupils' Attendance Records) Regulations 1991 improve the data on truancy by requiring schools to categorise pupils' absence in one of two ways: authorised or unauthorised. The additional costs of doing this are limited, since schools should already have been enquiring into reasons for absence. The draft regulations and explanatory circular were sent in advance as consultation documents to local education authorities and other bodies concerned.

Council for National Academic Awards

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what external legal advice his Department has received on the contractual status between the Council for National Academic Awards and students currently registered with that body who will not complete their courses or programmes of research until after September 1992.

Mr. Alan Howarth: It is not the usual practice of the Department to disclose whether it has received legal advice. My right hon. and learned Friend accepts that it will be essential for alternative arrangements to be made for students presently registered with the Council for National Academic Awards, but who will not complete their courses until after September 1992. As indicated in his answer on 16 December, *Official Report*, columns *31-33*, he is satisfied that the necessary arrangements are capable of being made within the planned timetable.

Validation Fees

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the maximum validation fee which may be charged under the present regulations for both polytechnics and universities; and what is the maximum fee proposed under arrangements for the future.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The maximum recommended fee for university validation of college courses in the academic year 1991-92 is £340. The Department will be consulting the Committee of Vic-Chancellors and Principals shortly about the fee for 1992-93 in respect of existing validation services. We believe that the current level may not allow for economies of scale as numbers of students have increased in recent years. In the case of new or existing degree awarding institutions offering validation services to other colleges for courses currently validated by the Council for National Academic Awards, the Department has requested estimates of the costs involved and the fee to be charged by the end of May. An analysis of the full costs associated with CNAA validation suggests that institutions offering validation on the same basis might be expected to offer a service at a fee ranging from under £150 to over £250, depending on the number of institutions, courses and students involved. The education departments will notify in June a maximum fee for validation services for 1992-93 in respect of students starring relevant courses in that academic year.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what have been the individual levels of *(a)* relief from liability for rates, *(b)* special purpose grant—VAT—and — annual maintenance grant for each grant-maintained school for each of the financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Rate relief, special purpose grant (VAT) and annual maintenance grant
Grant-maintained schools 1989-90

School	*Rate relief*[1] £	*Special purpose grant (V)* £	*Annual maintenance grant* £
Audenshaw	10,963	7,062	720,999
Bacup and Rawtenstall	8,182	11,777	798,379
Bankfield High	3,520	2,823	253,728
Baverstock	20,799	4,257	1,002,248
Castle Hill Middle	7,705	1,246	358,030
Colyton	4,183	6,271	418,166
Heckmondwike	7,413	8,481	635,755
Hendon	9,603	15,764	1,014,663
King's Grantham	0	18,136	725,427
London Oratory	0	49,700	1,987,982
Old Swinford	0	14,965	598,609
Queen Elizabeth Boys	10,115	16,747	1,074,470
Queen Elizabeth Grammar	0	8,977	359,080
Queensbury	36,314	0	830,089
St. Francis Xavier	0	12,676	507,040
St. James CE	0	16,157	646,289
Skegness Grammar	6,441	9,062	620,110
Small Heath	22,527	3,213	1,029,582
Wilmington Girls	8,495	3,459	478,148
Wilson's	0	20,540	821,616

[1] The amount of additional rate relief schools received as a result of acquiring charitable status. Former voluntary schools already had charitable status and received no new relief by virtue of becoming grant-maintained.

Rate relief, SPG(V), and annual maintenance grant
Grant maintained schools 1990-91

School	*Rate relief*[1] £	*SPG(V)* £	*AMG* £
Adams' Grammar	0	13,784	551,367
Audenshaw	31,669	2,795	1,378,570
Bacup and Rawtenstall	36,192	56	1,449,913
Bankfield	28,606	0	914,221
Baverstock	63,642	0	1,91[illegible],281
Beechen Cliff	28,595	8,580	1,48[illegible],988
Bishopshalt	17,829	10,597	1,137,055
Bournemouth	43,477	0	1,053,358
Bridgewater Hall	81,460	0	1,669,961
Brindley Hall	48,705	0	995,410
Bullers Wood	7,728	4,604	493,289
Cardinal Vaughan	0	45,977	1,839,088
Carre's	0	11,589	463,553
Castle Hall	23,601	0	665,222
Claremont	53,453	938	2,175,612
Colyton	18,892	4,519	936,438
Ecclesbourne	21,078	13,356	1,377,834
Francis Bacon	11,840	0	274,399
Guildford	29,655	0	875,906
Handsworth	0	9,254	370,145
Hardley	11,001	0	332,160
Heckmondwike	21,869	9,191	1,242,397
Hendon	31,948	14,420	1,854,762
King's Grantham	0	33,938	1,357,509
Lancaster Royal Grammar	0	42,295	1,691,815
London Nautical	43,500	0	1,376,869
London Oratory	0	88,298	3,531,926
Longfield	14,359	0	443,043
Marling	10,791	9,886	827,089
Netherthorpe	0	33,910	1,356,419
Old Swinford	0	27,777	1,111,088
Pate's Grammar	0	27,810	1,112,387
Queen Elizabeth Boys	27,316	24,654	2,078,790
Queen Elizabeth Grammar	0	16,298	651,917
Rickmansworth	40,587	0	1,076,521
Skegness	16,843	10,233	1,083,026
Small Heath	115,336	0	1,834,857
Southfield	45,936	0	1,197,409
Southlands, Berks	43,399	0	1,212,203
St. Francis Xavier	0	52,095	2,083,788
St. George's	7,998	1,442	377,592
St. James CE	0	30,903	1,236,106
Stroud	9,187	10,584	790,824
Watford Boys	0	29,937	1,197,489
Wilmington Girls	27,631	0	877,138
Wilson's	0	40,275	1,611,010
Wolverhampton	9,197	7,861	682,316
Wymondham	9,701	1,510	448,439

[1] The amount of additional rate relief schools received as a result of acquiring charitable status. Former voluntary schools already had charitable status and received no new relief by virtue of becoming grant-maintained.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what applications have been received from grant-maintained schools for special purpose grant-restructuring; and in each case *(a)* how many posts have been affected and *(b)* what grant has been paid.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

Application received from

Name of school	*Number of posts*[2]	*Grant (£) per school*[1] *Premature Retirement* *Lump Sum*	*Annual Compensation*	*Redundancy/ Voluntary severence*
Adams' Grammar School	3	12,992	4,331	—
Aylesford School	1	6,534	2,178	—
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School	4	15,600	5,200	—
Bankfield School	1	—	—	20,586
Baverstock School	2	8,631	2,877	—
Beechen Cliff School	3	16,310	5,436	—

[1] Special Purpose Grant (Restructuring) approved to date for payment to support relevant costs.

[2] Number of posts in respect of which of which Special Purpose Grant (Restructuring) has been approved to date.

Name of school	*Number of posts*	*Costs (£) per school* *Premature Retirement* *Lump Sum*	*Annual compensation*	*Redundancy/ Voluntary severance*
Bingley Grammar School	3	11,974	3,931	—
Bournemouth School	1	4,123	1,374	—
Bourne Abbey School	2	4,506	1,502	—
Bridgewater Hall School	1	6,077	2,026	—
Bullers Wood Girls Schools	2	9,736	3,245	—
Caistor Grammar School	4	19,497	6,499	—
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School	2	14,509	4,170	—
Carres Grammar School	2	10,219	3,406	—
Claremont High School	3	14,523	4,841	14,513
Colyton School	2	13,601	4,534	—
Crossley Heath School	3	16,015	5,338	—
Dartford Boys School	2	12,187	4,062	—
Ecclesbourne School	4	18,964	6,321	—
Francis Bacon School	3	9,357	3,119	—
Great Barr School	6	27,837	9,277	—
Handsworth Grammar School	1	6,836	2,279	—
Hardley School	2	11,134	3,711	—
Haydon School	1	5,970	1,990	—
Heckmondwike Grammar School	6	13,403	4,467	—
Hendon School	2	14,109	4,703	—
King Edward VI School	4	18,158	6,053	—
King John School	2	11,578	3,859	—
Kingsley Park School	2	12,168	4,056	—
Kingswood School	3	14,304	4,768	—
Kirkby Kendal School	2	6,512	2,171	—
Lancaster Girls Grammar School	4	13,772	4,591	—
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	5	19,391	6,475	—
Maplesden Noakes School	1	—	—	21,863
Marling School	1	3,257	1,086	—
Moseley Park GM School	1	5,933	1,978	11,852
Netherthorpe School	2	10,602	3,534	9,732
Nonsuch High School for Girls	4	9,134	3,044	—
Northampton School for Boys	1	4,508	1,503	9,478
Oldfield School	1	465	155	11,234
Pates Grammar School	2	12,515	4,172	—
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School	5	19,720	6,572	—
Queen Elizabeth School for Boys	1	5,459	1,820	—
Queensbury School	3	8,155	2,718	—
Queensmead School	4	17,410	5,803	—
Ribston Hall High School	4	11,934	3,978	9,594
St. Augustine's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School	1	7,231	2,410	—
St. Bartholomews School	3	14,604	4,870	—
St. Francis Xavier's College	2	10,200	3,400	—
St. Georges School (Kent)	3	16,210	5,403	—
St. Georges School (Lincolnshire)	4	18,093	6,031	—
Southfields School for Girls	1	8,462	2,821	—
Southlands School	2	—	—	10,420
Skegness Grammar School	4	16,110	5,371	—
Stroud High School	2	11,718	3,906	—
St. James' Church of England School (Bolton)	2	12,345	4,114	—
The North Halifax High School	3	11,753	3,918	—
Watford Grammar School	1	3,750	1,250	—
Westcliff High School for Boys	4	14,425	4,809	—
Wilmington Boys School	3	14,805	4,935	—

Name of school	Number of posts	Costs (£) per school Premature Retirement Lump Sum	Annual compensation	Redundancy/ Voluntary severance
Wilmington Girls School	1	—	—	722
Wilsons School	4	10,236	5,996	10,455
Wolverhampton Girls School	3	17,180	5,727	—
Wymondham College	6	23,168	7,723	—
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School[1]	—	—	—	—
Woodroffe School[1]	—	—	—	—
Arnewood School[1]	—	—	—	—

[1] Applications have been received from these three schools and are still under consideration.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which grant-maintained schools have made an application for a change of character; and, in each case, *(a)* what was the proposed change and *(b)* whether the proposed change has been approved.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is set out in the table.

School	Date of publication	Nature of proposed change	Outcome
Skegness Grammar School	1 November 1989	Addition of boarding provision	Approved 31 October 1990
Chalvedon School	5 June 1991	Change in age range from 11-16 to 11-18	Approved 27 August 1991
Castle Hall School	8 November 1991	Change in age range from 9-13 to 11-18; introduction of selective admissions arrangements; significant enlargement	Under consideration
The Cornwallis School	15 November 1991	Change in age range from 11-17 to 11-18	Under consideration
St. John the Baptist School	21 November 1991	Change in age range from 12-18 to 11-18	Under consideration
Hardley School	2 January 1992	Change in age range from 12-16 to 11-16	Under consideration
The King's School, Grantham	10 January 1992	Significant enlargement	Under consideration
Highams Park School	14 January 1992	Change in age range from 11-16 to 11-18	Under consideration
Avon Valley School	17 January 1992	Change in age range from 12-16 to 11-16; introduction of 50 selective places	Under consideration

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the proposed arrangements for the calculation of annual maintenance grant for grant-maintained schools for 1992-93; if he will make copies of the responses available; and whether the proposals are to be amended in the light of the responses received.

Mr. Eggar: We received some 60 responses to the consultation paper issued on 17 October last year, the majority from local education authorities and grant-maintained schools. We have not published the responses to previous consultations on annual maintenance grant and do not intend to do so this year. In reaching final decisions my right hon. and learned Friend considered carefully the responses submitted. As he announced in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 22 January *Official Report*, colums *245-46*, my right hon. and learned Friend has decided, subject to one technical change, to confirm the proposals set out in the consultation paper.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which grant-maintained schools have been visited by Her Majesty's inspectors; in each case *(a)* by how many inspectors, *(b)* for how long and *(c)* at what cost; and whether it is proposed to publish any report arising from these visits.

Mr. Eggar: At the end of December 1991, there were 102 schools operating under GM status and HMI had visited 66 of them. The table gives details of the visits made to each school.

HMI visits to GM schools made between September 1989 and December 1991

Visit	No. of visits	No. of HMI involved	Total HMI days	Cost £
Audenshaw H	4	4	4·0	1,090
Bacup and Rawtenstall	2	4	4·0	960
Baverstoc	3	9	27·0	6,480
Heckmondwike Grammar	4	6	9·5	2,280
London Oratory	5	5	5·0	1,330
Old Swinford Hospital	3	4	4·0	960

Visit	*No. of visits*	*No. of HMI involved*	*Total HMI days*	*Cost £*
Queen Elizabeth Grammar	3	4	4·0	960
Queensbury	3	8	21·0	5,040
Skegness Grammar	2	3	4·0	960
Small Heath	4	7	7·0	1,810
St. James CE	6	6	6·0	1,440
Wilmington Girls' Grammar	4	6	24·0	8,360
King's Grantham	3	5	5·0	1,200
Wilson's Sutton	2	2	2·5	600
Castle Hall	4	4	5·0	1,330
Hendon	4	7	7·0	2,070
Queen Elizabeth's Barnet	3	6	7·0	1,940
Audenshaw	3	3	1·0	720
Colyton Grammar	7	9	21·0	7,380
Bankfield High	2	7	22·0	5,280
St. Francis Xavier	3	4	4·0	1,090
Cardinal Vaughan	2	5	5·0	1,200
Claremont High	2	2	3·0	720
Lancaster Royal Grammar	2	2	2·0	610
London Nautical	1	3	6·0	1,440
Netherthorpe	1	2	1·0	240
Ribston Hall High	1	1	1·0	240
Southfield Girls	2	3	3·0	720
Southlands	2	2	2·0	610
Beecham Cliff	2	2	2·0	610
Long Field High	2	2	3·0	720
Adams' Grammar	3	4	4·0	1,350
Bishopshalt	2	2	2·5	795
Bournemouth Grammar	3	4	4·0	1,090
Brindgewater Hall	1	1	1·0	240
Bridley Hall	1	1	1·0	240
Carre's Grammar	1	3	3·0	720
Ecclesborne	1	2	2·0	480
Guildford	2	2	2·0	610
Marling	1	1	1·0	240
Pate's Grammar	1	2	2·0	480
Rickmansworth	2	5	17·0	6,030
Strand High	2	2	3·0	980
Wolverhampton Girls High	2	3	3·0	850
Bullers Wood Girls	1	1	1·0	240
Francis Bacon	2	3	3·0	850
Handsworth Grammar	1	1	1·0	240
Hardley	1	1	1·0	370
St. George's (Lincs)	2	2	2·0	740
Wymondham College	1	1	1·0	370
Chalvedon	1	1	2·0	740
Crossley Heath	2	2	2·0	740
Great Barr	2	2	2·0	740
Kingsley Park Middle	1	1	1·0	370
Lancaster Girls Grammar	1	1	1·0	370
North Halifax High	1	1	2·0	740
Reading	1	1	1·0	370
Stratford	1	2	2·0	740
Clitheroe Royal Grammar	1	1	1·0	370
The Cornwallis	1	1	1·0	370
The Maplesden Noakes	2	2	2·5	925
Caistor Grammar	1	1	1·0	370
Dartford Grammar	1	1	1·0	370
Graveny	1	1	1·0	370
Moseley Park	1	1	1·0	370
Queensmead	1	1	1·0	370
St. Augustine's RC	1	1	2·0	740

In all cases the inspector's findings were reported orally to the head, the chairman of governors where he or she was able to attend. None of these inspections was planned to lead to a published report. My right hon. and learned Friend will therefore not be publishing the findings of these individual school inspections.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many copies have been distributed and, in each case, at what cost of all the editions of the booklets *(a)* "School Governors, How to Become a Grant-Maintained School", *(b)* "Grant-Maintained Schools—Questions Parents Ask", *(c)* "Grant-Maintained Schools—What it Means for Staff" and *(d)* "Grant-Maintained Schools—Experiences During the First Year".

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is given in the table.

Publication	*Total cost (all editions)*[1] *£'000*	*Number of copies distributed (all editions) '000s*
School Governors: How to Become a Grant-Maintained School	55·4	217·5
Grant-Maintained Schools: Questions Parents Ask	70·9	677·1
Grant-Maintained Schools: What it Means for Staff	26·3	180·0
Grant-Maintained Schools: Experiences During the First Year	8·8	31·6

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[1] The costs recorded in the table include the costs of initial printing, revisions and reprints and postage cost of block distribution where recorded separately. Postage costs of ad hoc distributions are not available.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for each of the financial years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 *(a)* what applications have been received from grant-maintained schools for capital grant and what has been the level of grant approved in each case and *(b)* what has been the average capital allocation per pupil in the grant-maintained sector and the average capital expenditure per pupil in the local education authority-maintained sector.

Mr. Eggar: The tables for each of the years requested list the applications received for named projects and the allocations made. The table for 1992-93 does not include bids recently received from newly approved schools which will be considered in due course. In addition to the named project allocations, each grant-maintained school is eligible to claim a formula allocation of capital grant calculated by reference to pupil numbers. The formula for each of the years is as follows.

1990-91—£13,000 per school plus £6 per pupil
1991-92—£19,000 per school plus £9 per pupil
1992-93—£10,000 per school plus £20 per pupil.

The average capital expenditure per pupil at grant-maintained schools in 1990-91 was £181. Numbers of pupils in grant-maintained schools rise during the year as more schools become incorporated. In 1991-92 the average capital expenditure per pupil at the beginning of the year was £231. By the end of the year the average per pupil expenditure is likely to be around £100. Figures for 1992-93 will depend upon the total number of pupils in the sector.

The average capital expenditure per pupil at LEA-maintained schools is as follows:

	£
1990-91	103
1991-92	109
1992-93	110

Notes: The figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 for the LEA schools are forecast outturn. The 1992-93 figure is an estimate based on pupil number projections and expenditure levels assumed in the 1991 Autumn Statement.

Grant-maintained schools capital bids 1990-91: Complete list of bids

£ thousands

School and Project	*Total cost*	*Allocation*
Audenshaw High School		
New building	3,400	545
Exterior repairs	130	30
Interior repairs	190	—
Site and ground works	80	—
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School		
New classrooms	420	400
Sixth form rooms	400	—
Re-roofing	120	[1]138
Upgrade washroom	50	—
Window replacement	237	—
All weather sports pitch	100	—
Science laboratory refurbishment	270	85
Classroom refurbishment	245	—
Bankfield High School		
Resite and improve technology, art and modern language accommodation	480	480
Upgrade laboratories	275	—
New car park	20	—
New roof/pointing	244	—
New stage lighting	15	—
Sports hall	650	—
Baverstock School		
Extractor fan for CDT	10	10
Asbestos removal	15	15
Decoration	100	—
Beechen Cliff School		
Kitchen repair	150	[1]180
Classroom repairs	100	—
Caretaker's and medical inspection rooms	37	—
New building	600	210
Science extension	255	—
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School		
Library and sixth form extension	400	—
Roof replacement	190	[1]219
Technology rationalisation	381	—
Administration extension	120	—
Castle Hall		
Fire protection	26	—
Roofing	60	—
Repairs	72	11
Modification of school buildings	1,000	—
New boilers	40	—
Claremont High		
Urgent external repairs	398	248
Renovate laboratories	80	80
Internal repairs	223	—
Ground repairs	184	—
Improve toilets/windows	148	—
Colyton Grammar School		
New Technology block and sixth form block	1,242	811
Drama and music	877	—
Administration and medical inspection	70	—
Energy conservation	258	—
Heckmondwike Grammar School		

School and Project	Total cost	Allocation
Dry and wet rot	20	198
Gym windows	7	
Fire escapes	7	
Electrical and heating repairs	100	
Re-roofing	61	
External repairs	29	
Asbestos removal	33	
Replace temporary accommodation	1,833	—
Hendon School		
Improve washroom facilities	30	[1]35
Improve laboratories	86	[1]99
Renew windows	100	46
New building/alteration	763	—
The King's School, Grantham		
New classrooms	98	[1]128
Upgrade classrooms	38	—
The Royal Grammar School, Lancaster		
Rewiring	75	[1]87
Conversion to technical drawing room into IT room	21	[1]24
Build washrooms	44	44
Build new classrooms	650	—
Sixth form study area	177	—
New science laboratories	323	—
Repair/redecoration	22	—
New access to playing field	202	—
London Nautical School		
New classroom block	680	—
Re-roofing	90	100
Curtain walling	20	
Design, technology adaptions	65	—
Site and grounds works	25	—
London Oratory School		
Renovate laboratories	151	151
Internal repairs and decoration	535	—
Refurnishing	65	—
Staff room extension	68	—
Additional teaching space	342	—
Netherthorpe School		
Staff room	65	65
Old Swinford Hospital		
Staircase repairs	20	20
Repair fencing	7	7
Science preparation room	8	8
New laboratories	518	—
Reorganise offices	7	—
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School		
Replace buildings	1,850	100
Queen Elizabeth School for Boys		
Replace boilers	110	—
Window replacement	80	—
Health and safety	21	—
Repairs	280	90
Mechanical and electrical services	64	—
New teaching block	552	—
Queensbury School		
Repairs	110	27
Fence replacement	20	—
Boiler replacement	12	—
Science rationalisation	260	—
Fire safety	10	10
Craft, design and technology	20	20
Ribston Hall High School		
New CDT block	295	280
Remodel homecraft	30	—
Science suite	360	—
Access for disabled	90	—
Administration	130	—
Parking	55	—
Insulation	120	—
Energy conversation	100	—
Security system	35	—
Fire officer requirements	45	—
Furniture and equipment	120	—
St. Francis Xavier's College		
Extension and remodeiling to single site	5,455	—
Roof repairs	150	32
St. James's School		
Rebuild "B" block	650	350
Re-roof "A" block	90	—
Replace "A" block curtain walling	20	—
Site/ground works	25	—
Skegness Grammar School		
Additional furniture for current project	22	[1]25
Remodel classrooms	34	[1]39
Convert art to geography room	24	[1]28
Enlarge gym	40	—
New greenhouse	13	—
New administration accommodation	103	—
Refurbish kitchen	18	—
Ground repairs	13	—
Englarge sixth form block	70	—
Build swimming pool	500	—
Small Heath		
Roof repair	50	50
Wiring	25	—
Replace windows	30	—
Amalgamate on single site	1,000	—
Southfield School for Girls		
Technology block	428	—
Southlands School		
Conversion to design and technology	40	40
New sports complex	515	—
The Grammar School for Girls, Wilmington		
Roof replacement	23	23
Repairs to old block	21	21
Repair tennis courts	37	—
Enlarge premises	350	—
Refenestration	100	—
Repair caretaker's house	40	—
Wilson's School		
Build technology workshop and convert old space to science laboratory	347	200

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[1] Allocations increased to allow for costs omitted from bid eg VAT.

GM Schools Capital Bids 1991-92: Complete List of Bids

School and Project	Total Cost[1] £000's	Allocation £000's
Adams Grammar School		
Technical block	1,269	—
Repro/Recept/Stationery	38	—
Energy Efficiency	21	—
Health and Safety	21	21
Toilets	18	—
Audenshaw High School		
Sports Hall	765	—
Library	525	—
Conversion	225	225
Staff and Administration	200	—
External repairs	60	—
Internal repairs	85	—
Site and gound works	80	—

School and Project	*Total Cost[1] £000's*	*Allocation £000's*
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School		
Staff and Library	140	—
Room conversion	42	—
Washrooms	70	—
Emergency lighting	15	—
Bankfield High School		
Science Labs	327	—
Re-roofing	51	—
Re-fenestration	460	—
Baverstock School		
Teaching facilities	1,534	—
Sports facilities	1,290	—
Dining Hall	1,607	—
Library	231	—
Lab refurbishment	397	—
Beechen Cliff School		
Further work on 1990-91 project	824	320
Performing Arts and Gym	580	—
Extension	410	—
Repairs	113	—
Bishopshalt School		
Humanities Class Block	1,060	—
Sports Education Centre	887	—
Science Block	206	206
Music Block	162	—
Bournemouth School		
Art science tech	1,987	—
Repairs	605	300
M. I. Room and Sick Bay	53	—
Music Department	275	—
Bridgewater School		
Redevelopment of Science/Technology	284	—
Boiler replacement	65	65
Brindley Hall School		
Redevelopment of Science/Technology	223	—
Bullers Wood School		
Science Accommodation	228	228
Modern Language	480	—
Technical Accommodation	629	—
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School		
Library	280	—
CDT	286	—
Carre's Grammar School		
Technology and Laboratories	630	630
Sports Hall	640	—
Castle Hall Middle School		
Administration	420	—
Roof Renewal	65	65
Frame Repairs	40	40
Ground works	13	—
Fire Recommendations	29	—
Chalvedon School		
Cladding Block W	350	150
Security fencing	53	—
Cladding Block E	336	—
Cladding Upper School	450	—
Science/technical extension	180	—
Claremont High School		
Health and Safety	20	20
Science Block	1,449	—
Art Block	81	—
Building strategy	100	—
Main Block (roof)	33	—
Main Block (windows [f])	60	—
Main Block (GEN)	24	—
Main Block (Windows [r])	63	—
Laboratory	50	—
New Technical rooms	100	100
East Wing	720	—
Modern Language	20	—
Hall	360	—
Horsa Block	27	—
Kitchen	50	—
External surfaces	142	—
Gym	355	—
Playground fencing	22	—
Main Block toilets	52	—
Toilet conversion	30	—
Classrooms	27	—
Boundary fencing	37	—
Car workshop	16	—
Colyton Grammar School		
New Technical Centre	98	—
Library	224	—
Expressive Arts	450	—
Administration	30	—
Energy conservation	105	—
Crossley Heath School		
Re-roofing, dry rot	286	—
Science Accommodation	267	—
Technology	485	—
Re-organised accommodation	1,543	—
Window Repairs	22	—
Pointing of Stonework	23	—
Boys Gym Floor	12	—
Heating Improvements	26	—
Re-decoration	109	—
Hard Play Areas	69	—
Security Locks	13	—
Forestry Grounds	11	—
Ecclesbourne School		
New buildings	3,981	—
Repairs	1,800	400
Alterations	75	—
Francis Bacon School		
Science Laboratories	437	—
Modern Language	105	105
External surfaces	124	—
Guildford County School		
Library and Bus Studies	770	—
New Class Block	555	—
Music Block	100	—
Repairs	86	—
Extension/Adaptations	150	—
Handsworth Grammar School		
Science Laboratories	953	953
Re-furbish free rooms	96	—
Hardley School		
Re-roofing	30	30
Heckmondwike Grammar School		
Technology refurbishment	252	252
Windows (Art Room)	10	—
External repairs	26	—
Repairs (Old Block)	246	—
Hendon School		
Science and Maths extension	852	—
Biology Laboratory	92	92
Windows (main)	108	108
Windows (Gym)	45	—
Kings School Grantham		

School and Project	*Total Cost*[1] *£000's*	*Allocation £000's*
Teaching block (Phase II)	463	—
Lancaster Girls Grammar School		
Toilets	89	—
CDT extension	383	379
Science Laboratory	75	—
6th Form	174	—
Lancaster Royal Grammar School		
Computer studies	498	—
London Nautical School		
Fire Alarms and Re-wiring	112	50
New Technology and Scientific complex	234	—
Windows	46	—
Toilets	39	—
Kitchen servery	52	—
London Oratory School		
Design and Technology	216	216
Passenger lifts	62	—
Health and Safety	46	—
Additional teaching	404	—
Long Field High School		
Roof repairs	486	236
Craft and Science improvement	10	—
Maplesdon Noakes School		
Re-roof and remodel laboratories	250	—
Information Technology	55	—
Extension and Adaption Technology Block	605	—
Marling School		
Classroom block	877	—
Neverthorpe School		
Building plan	1,455	—
North Halifax High School		
Health and Safety	148	100
Library and resource centre	148	—
Music Text and Technology	128	—
Changing rooms repairs	28	—
Staff accommodation	70	—
Concrete cladding repairs	153	—
Health and Safety	51	—
Art and English	80	—
IT facilities	55	—
All weather pitch	82	—
Drama facilities	25	—
Heating	30	—
Boiler conversion	66	—
Classroom furniture	10	—
External repairs	6	—
Electrical repairs	24	—
Science laboratories	319	—
Old Swinford Hospital School		
Extension	500	500
Pates Grammar		
New building	7,620	1,500
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School		
Design and Technology	503	503
Queen Elizabeth School for Boys		
Science Laboratories	890	—
Library	505	—
CDT	512	—
Gymnasium	730	—
Queensbury School		
Science block	460	—
Ribston Hall School		
CDT block	296	—
Gym	451	—
Expressive arts	150	—
Sixth form accommodation	180	—
Heating system	72	—
Scola cladding	121	—
Parking and road widening	68	—
Security system	30	—
External decoration	32	—
Disabled provision	102	—
Roof	28	—
Rickmansworth School		
Art and Technical block	1,545	—
Technical block work	415	—
Library	225	—
Repairs	9	—
St. Francis Xavier's College		
Move to single site	3,210	200
St. George's School		
Science/Replace temporary classrooms	732	—
Science/Replace temporary classrooms	489	—
Technical/art suite	515	—
Staff and humanities	400	—
St James Church of England School		
Craft block	140	—
Re-roofing	70	—
Skegness Grammar School		
Various (including Administration)	897	—
Kitchen and Canteen	63	63
New Technical block	612	—
Classrooms	204	—
External works	33	—
Sixth form accommodation	180	—
Swimming pool	630	—
Small Heath School		
Move to 1 site	1,500	—
Maths suite	25	25
Science accommodation	100	—
Windows	80	80
Roofing	13	—
Playground	21	—
Dining annex	32	—
Southfield School for Girls		
Technology block	650	650
Southlands Comprehensive		
Re-roofing (Art block)	57	57
Playground and Netball	15	—
Re-roofing (Corridor)	12	12
Re-roofing (Senior school)	44	44
Sports hall	515	—
Stratford School		
First Science Laboratory	51	51
Boilers	34	—
Spandrel repairs	34	34
Roof	252	—
Second Science Laboratory	51	—
Windows	34	34
Structural repairs	46	—
Stroud High School		
Classroom block	877	—
Watford Grammar School for Boys		
Change of use and re-build	714	—
Repairs	80	80

School and Project	*Total Cost[1] £000's*	*Allocation £000's*
Wilmington Grammar School for Girls		
Dry rot	151	—
Windows	58	—
Extension	350	—
Conversion to CDT	45	45
Caretaker's cottage	47	—
Wilson's School		
Computing	29	—
Extension	840	—
Art room	135	—
Wolverhampton Girls High School		
Extension and alterations	870	—
Wymondham College		
Technology block	940	—
Extension to Science block	237	—

[1] Total bid figures include amounts requested for the financial years 1991-92 and 1992-93 only

GM schools capital bids 1992-93: Complete list of bids (first tranche)

School and project	*Total cost £000's*	*Allocation £000's*
Adams Grammar School		
CDT building	498	—
Arnewood School		
Technology, IT and classrooms	898	—
Technology, IT and classrooms	1,181	—
Audenshaw High School		
Fume and Dust extraction. Asbestos removal	50	—
New sports hall and conversions	600	—
Library and bus studies and converions	400	—
Avon Valley School		
Sports hall roof repair	17	17
Sports hall floor	40	—
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School		
Convert solid fuel boilers to gas	90	—
Science lab/multi media room	115	—
Refurbish boys washroom	51	—
Bankfield High School		
Refenestration	498	—
Re-roofing	53	—
Science laboratories	220	—
Baverstock School		
Teaching block	1,152	470
Reroofing of existing building	284	—
Beaconsfield High School		
New technology block and refurbishment	1,044	750
Practical block refurbishment	40	—
Staff room/library refurbishment	20	—
Beechen Cliff School		
Drainage and structure monitoring	151	—
Sanitary, drainage and asbestos removal	166	160
Additional floor (business/computers)	1,009	—
Bingley Grammar School		
Science wing extension	400	250
Bishopshalt School		
Sports education centre	864	—
Music block extension	159	—
Bourne Abbey Primary School		
Two classrooms and medical facilities	160	160
Science and technology	288	—
Car park/playground	45	—
Bournemouth School		
Rationalise science and technology	546	546
Rationalise technology and part of science	776	—
Bridgewater Hall School		
Science/technology	260	—
Brindley Hall School		
Brindley Hall School phase III	1,828	—
Music practice rooms	20	—
Bullers Wood School for Girls		
New technology block	375	375
Craft, textiles, electronics, etc.	260	—
Burgate School		
Extension and science and technology room	489	—
Extension to main school	369	—
Caistor Grammar School		
Technology, science and IT building	501	287
Accommodation for music	119	—
Hard surface play area	43	—
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School		
Technology unit	573	—
Carres Grammar School		
Main hall roof	57	—
Sports Hall	540	—
Castle Hall School		
Fire regulation work	120	—
New science and CDT centre	1,141	—
Structural and annex repairs	65	—
Chalvedon School		
Re-cladding middle school block	565	250
Science/technology extension	340	—
Three storey English/drama block	250	—
Claremont High School		
Replace sub-standard accommodation	1,725	—
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School		
Three new science laboratories	490	—
Essential structural repairs	145	145
Replace temporary mobile classrooms	435	—
Collingwood School		
Fabric—capital repairs	290	50
S Block refurbishment	182	—
Technology block refurbishment	300	—
Colyton Grammar School		
Convert and refurbish school hall	148	—
Coopers School		
Technology, business, science and art	1,745	—
Four laboratories in existing block	472	—
Two new laboratories in existing block	162	—
The Cornwallis School		
Science and technology	313	—
Crossley Heath School		
Fire precaution work	210	210
Alterations to form technology suite	594	—
Refurbish science accommodation	250	—

School and project	*Total cost £000's*	*Allocation £000's*
Dartford Grammar School for Boys		
New science and technology block	425	260
Technology, science, washrooms and repairs	265	—
Sports hall and changing accommodation	445	—
Ecclesbourne School		
New building: Block H	1,590	780
Francis Bacon School		
Renew boilers and associated work	85	—
Implement fire brigade report	99	—
Remodel to National Curriculum science	165	—
Graveney School		
Washroom refurbishment in gym area	368	100
Repair/refurbishment of technology block	869	—
Refurbish lower school science	268	—
Great Barr School		
Library and six technology spaces	1,283	700
Guildford County School		
Library and business studies	770	—
New classroom block	370	370
Handsworth Grammar School		
Dining hall and kitchen	575	—
Refurbishment of science laboratory	90	—
Specialist technology rooms	212	—
Hardley School		
Heating system improvements	265	130
Re-roofing works	85	—
Haydon School		
IT/maths block and adaption to technology	480	—
IT/maths block and adaption to science	400	—
Convert hall to 6th form accommodation	240	—
Heckmondwike Grammar School		
Extend to modern language area	244	—
Repairs—old block	343	200
Hendon School		
Separate pedestrian and motor traffic	70	—
New science and maths building	865	—
Refurbish home economics department	130	—
Highams Park School		
Replace and enlarge maths building	550	—
Re-roof technology workshops	29	29
Add paved recreation area	59	—
Homewood School		
New design and technology suite and adaptions	1,373	—
Replace boilers in science block	42	—
Stage one of new science block	1,387	—
King Edward VI School		
IT/Maths block. Conversion to library	425	—
Drama/performing arts space	345	—
Improvements to PE/games facilities	260	—
The King's School, Grantham		
Science and technology extension	305	—
Vicarage block phase 2	491	—
Castlegate Block extension	190	—
Kingsley Park Middle School		
Asbestos, fire escapes and technology	370	50
Kitchen/dining and asbestos removal	236	—
Kingswood School		
Food technology, graphics and tech rooms	330	330
New drama/dance block	250	—
Adaptions to create two science laboratories	120	—
Kirkbie Kendal School		
Single site—phase one of two	1,800	—
Lancaster Girls Grammar School		
Upgrading cloakrooms	108	50
Phase two extension of 6th form block	489	—
Phase three extension music centre	354	—
The Royal Grammar School, Lancaster		
New Information technology centre	124	124
Correct defects in heating system	58	—
Replacement of heating boilers	25	—
London Nautical School		
Upgrade 35 year old science laboratory	172	150
Boiler replace and central heating radiators	390	—
Replace existing fire doors	30	—
London Oratory School		
Re-equip/local kitchen/dining facilities	243	—
Long Field High School		
Re-roofing phase two	200	100
Science laboratory and preparatory room	122	—
Langley Park Boys School		
Library and design and technology facilittes	577	—
Manor High School		
Upgrade site to H and S requirements	181	60
Refurbish science and technology	152	—
External refurbishment	122	—
The Maplesden Noakes School		
Conversions of science and technology	210	—
Decentralise boilers. Heaters	200	—
Marling School		
New science and IT facilities	499	—
Moseley Park School		
New technology suite	1,552	—
Moulton Primary School		
Implement development plan	1,024	—
Curriculum development, phases one to three	662	—
Netherthorpe School		
Technology, science and art	497	—
Sixth form accommodation	492	—
Modern languages	345	—
Newton Bluecoat C of E Primary School		
Class, changing, medical and adaptation	150	—
Classroom and staff changing room	105	—
Class, changing, medical, adaptation etc.	180	—
Nonsuch High School for Girls		
Extend and remodel design and technology	700	700

School and project	*Total cost £000's*	*Allocation £000's*
North Halifax High School		
Conversion and refit of science laboratory	91	—
Work required by fire officer	85	—
Science laboratory, windows and roof	50	—
Northwood School		
New technology block and conversions	435	400
New technology block and conversions	420	—
Oldfield School		
Extend/convert science, technology and maths	1,190	—
Urgent fabric and structure work	261	50
Furmiters School		
Information technology building	588	—
Hard standing	129	—
Pate's Grammar School		
Redevelopment phase two	1,997	1,997
Redevelopment phase three	1,125	—
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School		
Replace fire hazard wood laboratories	445	—
Queen Elizabeth School for Boys		
Replace windows in main block	300	50
New technology block	485	—
Queensbury School		
Fire safety provisions	61	40
Refurbish and reorganise science	192	—
Queensmead School		
Roofing gymnasium block	52	52
Remodel to create science laboratories	57	—
Raines Foundation School		
New extension to upper school	1,277	—
Staff room extension, lower school	53	—
Reading School		
Science and technology facilities	975	630
Ribston Hall School		
Boilers and controls for heating	70	68
Replace glazed aluminium cladding	123	—
Rickmansworth School		
Remodel and repair craft block	369	250
Major repairs to drama block roof	16	—
St. Augustine Roman Catholic School		
New science and technology block	465	—
IT, science, technology and library	600	—
New classroom block	520	—
St. Bartholemew's School		
Fume and chemical cupboards, stairs	156	155
Remodelling art and design	426	—
St. Francis Xavier's College		
Sixth form centre	2,670	—
Two storey classroom block	1,312	—
Laboratories, staff room, classroom, music	1,074	—
St. George's Church of England School		
Extend maths/science block	455	—
Extend and alter D and T block	500	—
St. George's School, Sleaford		
Science block, including cloakroom	440	—
Technology block	210	[1]500
SLD unit/staff accommodation	55	—
St. Helen's Primary School		
Replace huts and washrooms	285	—
St. James's C of E School		
Re-roofing of block A	125	—
Science and technology refurbishment	180	—
Hard play, paths, pitch repair	80	—
St. John the Baptist School		
Science/HE, CDT, changing rooms	1,319	—
Science. Classroom and staff accommodation	965	—
Maintenance. Replace huts. Car Park	520	—
Sexey's School		
Technology centre and boiler house	1,340	—
Skegness Grammar School		
Replace temporary classrooms	800	—
Boarding facilities	400	—
Improve sports facilities	340	—
Small Heath School		
Kitchen/dining at lower school	338	—
Ventilation of science laboratories	34	—
Replace boiler at lower school	55	—
Southfield School for Girls		
Flat roof repairs	75	—
Southlands Comprehensive School, Kent		
Replace substandard maths accommodation	658	—
Additional science lab accommodation	350	—
Regroup technology accommodation	658	—
Southlands School, Reading		
Refurbish three science laboratories	71	—
Replace felt flat roofing	66	—
Refurbish two science laboratories	47	—
Stratford School		
Roofing replacement	369	—
Science laboratory refurbishment	115	—
Replace boilers	34	—
Stroud High School		
Science block	786	780
Thamesview School		
Health and Safety	149	100
Curriculum development: remodelling	359	—
Vyners		
Science and technology	1,262	638
Watford Grammar School for Boys		
Conversion to design and technology centre	183	180
Renewal of gutters	172	—
Watford Girls Grammar School		
Design and technology and music	676	400
Design and technology and music	715	—
Flammable store	18	—
Westcliff High School for Boys		
New technology block	280	280
Extension to science block	170	—
New dining and small halls	352	—
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys		
Refurbish technology and one science laboratory	150	—
Refurbishment of toilet block	115	—
Boiler house renewal	146	145

School and project	*Total cost £000's*	*Allocation £000's*
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington		
Provision of new science laboratory	171	170
Adaption existing art room	16	—
Wilson's School		
New art and food technology and modifications	235	—
Wold Newton Primary School		
New classroom	69	—
Physical Education hall	157	—
Science and Technology Centre	75	—
Wolverhampton Girls High School		
Extensions and alterations	850	450
Woodroffe School		
Science and technology	1,457	—
Library resource area	76	—
Wymondham College		
Replacement accommodation	2,150	—
Nissen hut refurbishment	805	—
Short term upgrade	135	—

[1] Provisional allocation.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which primary schools that have submitted proposals for grant-maintained status offer nursery provision

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

LEA	*School*	*Decision*
Bedfordshire	Thomas Whitehead CE School	Approved
Ealing	Wood End First School	Undecided
Hertfordshire	Parkside First School	Undecided
Solihull	Hatchford Junior and Infants School	Undecided
Lewisham	Thurnham Junior and Infant School	Undecided
Bolton	Crompton Fold County Primary School	Undecided

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which grant-maintained schools have published their proposals later than the guidance given in paragraph 30 of "School Governors—How to Become a Grant-Maintained School" for the proposed date of implementation; and, in each case, what was the date of *(a)* publication of the proposals, *(b)* his decision and *(c)* actual date of implementation.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

Name	*Date of publication of proposals* *Column 1*	*Decision date/ date of approval letter* *Column 2*	*Date of proposed implementation* *Column 3*	*Date of implementation where different from Column 3* *Column 4*
Baverstock Grant-Maintained School	13 February 1989	12 May 1989	1 September 1989	—
The Kings School, Grantham	28 February 1989	17 May 1989	1 September 1989	—
Old Swinford Hospital	28 February 1989	2 June 1989	1 September 1989	—
Heckmondwike Grammar School	17 March 1989	10 June 1989	1 September 1989	—
Southfield School	23 February 1989	9 November 1989	1 September 1989	1 April 1990
Watford Grammar School	20 October 1989	12 February 1990	1 April 1990	1 September 1990
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys	8 March 1990	8 January 1991	1 September 1990	1 April 1991
North Halifax High School	26 January 1990	21 May 1990	1 August 1990	1 April 1991
Wymondham College	22 June 1990	14 November 1990	1 January 1991	—
London Oratory School	7 February 1989	20 April 1989	1 September 1989	—
Queen Elizabeth's Grant-Maintained School for Boys	10 February 1989	5 May 1989	5 September 1989	—
Colyton Grammar School	23 February 1989	5 May 1989	6 September 1989	—
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School	28 February 1989	19 May 1989	1 September 1989	—
Castle Hall Grant-Maintained School	10 March 1989	10 June 1989	5 September 1989	—
Small Heath School	1 March 1989	12 June 1989	1 September 1989	—
St. Francis Xavier's College	14 June 1989	25 August 1989	1 January 1990	—
Carre's Grammar School	8 March 1990	21 May 1990	1 September 1990	—
Bournemouth School	8 March 1990	21 May 1990	1 September 1990	—
Ecclesbourne School	6 April 1990	21 May 1990	1 September 1990	—
Cornwallis School	17 July 1990	21 January 1991	1 January 1991	1 April 1991
Reading School	6 September 1990	13 March 1991	1 April 1991	—
Hardley School	18 July 1990	17 October 1990	1 January 1991	—
Kingsley Park Middle School	19 October 1990	25 January 1991	1 April 1991	—
Avon Valley School	16 November 1990	26 March 1991	1 April 1991	1 September 1991
Oldfield School	14 December 1990	28 March 1991	1 April 1991	1 September 1991
St. George's Church of England School	6 February 1991	4 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Great Barr School	11 December 1990	28 February 1991	1 April 1991	—
Parmiters School	15 February 1991	2 September 1991	1 September 1991	—
Hayes Manor School	12 July 1991	18 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Dartford Grammar School	5 February 1991	1 July 1991	1 September 1991	—
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	1 February 1991	22 April 1991	1 September 1991	—
Watford Grammar School for Girls	7 February 1991	18 July 1991	1 September 1991	—
Copland Community School	14 March 1991	25 November 1991	1 September 1991	1 April 1992
Newton Bluecoat Church of England Grant-Maintained Primary School	1 March 1991	4 July 1991	1 September 1991	—
Wold Newton Primary School	4 March 1991	16 July 1991	1 September 1991	—
Vyners School	6 February 1991	5 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Bourne Primary School	4 February 1991	11 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Highams Park School	12 March 1991	10 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Southlands Comprehensive School	19 February 1991	1 July 1991	1 September 1991	—
St. Helen's Primary School	11 March 1991	12 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Langley Park Boys School	29 March 1991	10 July 1991	1 September 1991	—

Name	Date of publication of proposals Column 1	Decision date/ date of approval letter Column 2	Date of proposed implementation Column 3	Date of implementation where different from Column 3 Column 4
Coopers School	28 February 1991	10 July 1991	1 September 1991	—
Collingwood School	22 March 1991	25 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Raines Foundation School	27 March 1991	11 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Graveney School	26 March 1991	28 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Moulton Primary School	11 March 1991	12 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Arnewood School	29 March 1991	15 July 1991	1 September 1991	—
Budmouth School	14 June 1991	30 October 1991	1 January 1992	—
Burntwood School	5 July 1991	3 December 1991	1 January 1992	—
Lincoln Christ's Hospital School	14 June 1991	30 October 1991	1 January 1992	—
Northwood School	19 April 1991	16 September 1991	1 September 1991	1 January 1992
St. John the Baptist School	15 April 1991	25 June 1991	1 September 1991	—
Dartford Grammar School for Girls	5 June 1991	4 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Desborough Comprehensive School	21 June 1991	3 September 1991	1 January 1992	—
Oldborough Manor High	21 June 1991	29 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Yarborough High School	12 June 1991	25 September 1991	1 January 1992	6 January 1992
Loddon Middle School	17 June 1991	3 October 1991	1 January 1992	—
Glyn School	10 June 1991	1 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Snodland Church of England Primary School	4 June 1991	20 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
King John School	11 June 1991	15 October 1991	1 January 1992	—
Simon Langton Boys' Grammar School	3 June 1991	20 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Brookmead School	11 July 1991	14 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Gordon's School	10 June 1991	3 September 1991	1 January 1992	—
Cranbrook School	16 August 1991	17 December 1991	1 January 1992	—
Hartshill School	21 June 1991	24 September 1991	1 January 1992	—
Gresham Village School	26 June 1991	16 October 1991	1 January 1992	—
King John School, Benfleet	19 July 1991	5 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Heacham Middle School	6 June 1991	19 August 1991	1 January 1992	—
Denefield School	15 July 1991	1 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Langley Grammar School, Slough	12 July 1991	4 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Parkstone Grammar School, Poole	10 July 1991	2 December 1991	1 January 1992	1 April 1992
La Retraite School	26 June 1991	11 October 1991	1 January 1992	—
Ringwood Comprehensive School	25 June 1991	30 October 1991	1 January 1992	—
John Fisher School	31 July 1991	14 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Gartree School	27 June 1991	1 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Beaverwood School for Girls	4 September 1991	22 January 1992	1 April 1992	—
Castle Hills School, Gainsborough	16 September 1991	27 January 1992	1 April 1992	—
Myton School	13 September 1991	3 December 1991	1 April 1992	—
Hayton Church of England Primary School	20 September 1991	10 January 1992	1 April 1992	—
Northampton School for Boys	25 July 1991	11 November 1991	1 January 1992	—
Thomas Whitehead Church of England School	24 September 1991	19 December 1991	1 April 1992	—
West Hatch High School	30 October 1991	28 January 1992	1 April 1992	—

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the cost of ballots of parents held under section 61 of the Education Act 1988; for which schools he has required a fresh ballot to be held as a result of his guidance not being followed; and, in each case, what was the reason and who paid the cost of each ballot.

Mr. Eggar: The total cost of ballots up to 31 December 1991 is £349,421·48. A fresh ballot has had to be held at two schools. In the case of both Edenbridge middle school in Kent LEA and Deighton high school in Kirklees LEA, there were significant errors in the compilation of the electoral roll.

In both cases the costs of the ballots were met by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been *(a)* the maximum possible and *(b)* the actual level of transitional grant in respect of each grant-maintained school; and for what purposes the approved expenditure was incurred.

Mr. Eggar: Transitional grant is paid for extra management and other expenditure incurred in the course of changing over to grant-maintained status. The maximum transitional grant allocation and the amount actually claimed and paid to date in the case of each grant-maintained school or school approved for grant-maintained status are as follows:

School	Maximum allocation available £	Amount of grant claimed and paid £
Adams' Grammar School	21,675·00	21,675·00
Arnewood School	60,000·00	48,499·00
Ash Green School	44,160·00	43,660·00
Audenshaw School	25,875·00	25,875·00
Avon Valley School	40,770·00	40,770·00
Aylesford School	58,560·00	58,400·00
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School	26,115·00	26,115·00
Bankfield High School	21,510·00	21,510·00
Baverstock School	29,700·00	29,700·00
Beaconsfield High School	54,750·00	54,750·00
Beechen Cliff School	27,990·00	27,990·00
Bingley Grammar School	58,020·00	58,020·00
Bishopshalt School	28,775·00	28,775·00
Bourne Primary School	45,510·00	45,510·00
Bournemouth School	28,035·00	28,035·00
Brookmead School	37,140·00	37,000·00
Budmouth School	57,750·00	31,600·00
Bullers Wood School	58,260·00	58,260·00
Burgate School	43,650·00	43,650·00
Burntwood School	60,000·00	49,500·00
Caistor Grammar School	42,300·00	40,932·00

School	*Maximum allocation available* £	*Amount of grant claimed and paid* £
Cardinal Vaughan School	23,880·00	23,880·00
Carre's Grammar School	20,700·00	20,700·00
Castle Hall School	21,075·00	21,000·00
Chalvedon School	60,000·00	60,000·00
Christ Church School	36,210·00	[2]—
Christ's Hospital School	60,000·00	53,209·00
Claremont High School	28,515·00	28,515·00
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	52,980·00	52,980·00
Collingwood School	60,000·00	60,000·00
Colyton Grammar School	21,495·00	21,495·00
Coopers School	60,000·00	43,722·00
Copland Community School	55,020·00	55,000·00
Cornwallis School	54,360·00	33,220·00
Cranbrook School	50,880·00	[2]—
Crofton Junior School	49,560·00	[1]—
Crossgates Primary School	37,080·00	32,962·00
Crossley Heath School	50,700·00	50,700·00
Denefield School	56,520·00	[2]—
Dartford Grammar School	54,480·00	54,462·50
Dartford Grammar School for Girls	51,840·00	51,840·00
Desborgh' School	60,000·00	51,850·00
Ecclesbourne School	30,000·00	30,000·00
Elmwood School	44,430·00	[2]—
Francis Bacon School	43,980·00	43,980·00
Fulston Manor High School	52,620·00	[2]—
Gartree School	41,220·00	41,219·00
Gamlingay Village College	35,040·00	[2]—
Glyn High School	54,420·00	54,417·00
Gordons School	38,400·00	38,400·00
Graveney School	60,000·00	55,000·00
Great Barr School	60,000·00	60,000·00
Gresham Primary School	22,490·00	20,190·00
Guildford School	25,995·00	25,995·00
Handsworth School	53,310·00	53,310·00
Hardley School	51,060·00	51,060·00
Hartshill School	49,410·00	49,410·00
Haydon School	60,000·00	60,000·00
Hayes School, Bromley	60,000·00	60,000·00
Hayes Manor School	49,800·00	[2]—
Heacham Middle School	36,090·00	34,500·00
Heckmondwike Grammar School	23,475·00	23,475·00
Hendon School	27,540·00	27,540·00
Highams Park School	60,000·00	60,000·00
Homewood School	60,000·00	60,000·00
John Fisher School	53,370·00	43,370·00
Kelsey Park School	51,660·00	45,750·00
King Edward VI School	46,380·00	46,380·00
King John School, Northants	38,220·00	38,220·00
King John School, Essex	60,000·00	41,623·00
Kings School	26,150·00	26,150·00
Kingsley Park School	39,750·00	39,750·00
Kingswood School	57,870·00	57,870·00
Kirkbie Kendal School	57,600·00	57,600·00
La Retraite High School	47,820·00	47,499·44
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	27,675·00	27,675·00
Lancaster Girls Grammar School	49,260·00	49,260·00
Langley Grammar School	48,060·00	44,373·00
Langley Park School	60,000·00	[2]—
Loddon Middle School	37,890·00	35,100·00
London Nautical School	20,895·00	20,895·00
Long Field High School	20,880·00	20,880·00
London Oratory School	30,000·00	30,000·00
Magdalen Primary School	37,020·00	33,570·00
Manor High School	48,780·00	30,732·60
Maplesden Noakes School	49,710·00	49,710·00
Marling School	25,890·00	25,890·00
Mellow Lane School	60,000·00	[2]—
Moseley Park School	60,000·00	60,000·00
Moulton Primary School	41,640·00	41,640·00
Myton School	60,000·00	50,715·00
North Halifax High School	50,040·00	50,040·00
Netherthorpe School	23,205·00	23,205·00
Newlands Spring Primary School	39,870·00	35,350·00
Newton Bluecoat School	38,340·00	38,340·00
Nonsuch High School	56,820·00	56,813·75
Northampton Boys School	52,020·00	21,160·00
Northwood School	59,490·00	52,500·00
Oldborough Manor School	51,450·00	[2]—
Old Swinford Hospital School	23,160·00	23,160·00
Oldfield School	48,450·00	48,450·00
Parkstone School	48,630·00	48,630·00
Parmiters' School	58,620·00	[1]—
Pate's Grammar School	30,000·00	30,000·00
Philip Morant School	60,000·00	53,783·00
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Lincolnshire	19,935·00	19,935·00
Queen Elizabeth Boy's School, Barnet	30,000·00	30,000·00
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Cumbria	45,120·00	2,500·00
Queensbury School	24,555·00	24,555·00
Queensmead School	55,500·00	55,500·00
Raine's Foundation School	56,010·00	50,863·13
Ravens Wood School for Boys School	55,710·00	47,716·00
Reading School	49,770·00	19,000·00
Redgate Middle School	24,920·00	24,920·00
Ribston Hall School	22,290·00	22,275·00
Rickmansworth School	28,965·00	28,965·00
Riddlesdown High School	57,630·00	46,100·00
Ringwood School	52,110·00	12,650·00
Salterlee Primary School	22,190·00	14,750·00
Senacre Technology School	57,630·00	57,630·00
Sexey's School	41,610·00	41,610·00
St. Francis Xavier's School	30,000·00	30,000·00
Simon Langton School	48,840·00	48,840·00
Skegness Grammar School	23,520·00	23,520·00
Small Heath School	26,535·00	26,535·00
Snodland Primary School	40,680·00	26,015·00
Southfield School	24,225·00	24,225·00
Southlands Comprehensive School, Kent	60,000·00	60,000·00
Southlands School, Berkshire	23,115·00	23,115·00
St. George's School, Lincolnshire	56,100·00	56,099·75
St. Mary's School	25,850·00	23,550·21
St. Bartholomew's School	60,000·00	27,435·00
St. John The Baptist School	49,800·00	44,938·29
St. Helens Primary School	37,620·00	37,528·33
St. George's School, Kent	60,000·00	60,000·00
St. James' School	24,930·00	24,930·00
St. Augustine's School	45,120·00	45,119·25
Stantonbury Campus	60,000·00	60,000·00
Stratford School	52,950·00	52,950·00
Stroud High School	25,515·00	25,515·00
Thamesview School	60,000·00	60,000·00
The Crypt School	40,740·00	40,740·00
The Plume School	60,000·00	59,850·00
Thomas Whitehead School	36,690·00	31,244·00
Uxbridge High School	51,120·00	41,597·75
Vyners School	57,540·00	50,900·00
Watford Girls Grammar School	58,470·00	58,470·00
Watford Grammar School	30,000·00	30,000·00
Westcliff High School	55,050·00	55,050·00
Wilmington Girls Grammar School	21,765·00	21,760·00
Wilmington Boys School	40,560·00	40,560·00
Wilson's School	25,875·00	25,875·00
Wold Newton School	22,880·00	22,800·00
Wolverhampton School	23,445·00	23,445·00
Woodroffe School	55,170·00	55,170·00
Wrotham School	41,730·00	41,730·00
Wymondham College	53,970·00	53,970·00
Yarborough High School	60,000·00	39,470·00

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[1] Claim under consideration.

[2] No claim received to date.

Nursery Education

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide an estimate of the money spent by local education authorities in England and Wales in 1990-91 and 1991-92 on providing education and nursery care for three and four year-olds.

Mr. Eggar: Responsibility for education and day care in Wales rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and for day care in England with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. My Department's estimates of recurrent expenditure by local education authorities in England on education for the under fives are £685 million in 1990-91 and £776 million in 1991-92.

Schools Branch 4

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the functional responsibilities of and number of staff employed in schools branch 4, division B, at his Department; and what was the cost of this branch in 1990-91, the estimated cost for 1991-92 and the budgeted cost for 1992-93.

Mr. Eggar: There are currently 53 staff working in this division which is responsible for policy on grant maintained schools, including transitional arrangements and recurrent and capital funding. The running costs of this division in 1990-91 were approximately £372,000. Estimated outturn in 1991-92 is some £700,000. Budgets for 1992-93 have not yet been set.

Teachers' Salaries

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of teachers, and at which grades, earn more than £20,280 a year.

Mr. Fallon: Approximately 124,000 teachers, representing one third of the teaching force in primary and secondary schools in England and Wales, are currently paid more than £20,280 per annum. Of these, some 28,000 are head teachers, 31,000 are deputy head teachers and 65,000 are classroom teachers who are paid on the standard scale and hold an incentive allowance.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of school sixth forms with *(a)* fewer than 50 students and *(b)* between 50 and 100 students and *(c)* more than 100 students.

Mr. Eggar: The table shows the number of maintained schools and CTCs with sixth forms in England in January 1991 in each of the categories requested.

Number of Students	*Number of Schools*
49 and fewer	246
50—100	482
101 and more	1,274

Further Education

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish details of the formula to be used to determine the level of resources to be redistributed from local education authorities to the Further Education Funding Council under the provisions of the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*.

Mr. Eggar: The Government are considering the level of resources to be transferred from revenue support grant to reflect the shift in responsibilities from local education authorities to the Further Education Funding Council from 1 April 1993. We shall be consulting the local authority associations on proposals for the annual local authority finance settlement for 1993-94 in due course.

Voluntary Aided Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list any additional financial support for local education authorities to fund in 1992-93 minor works projects of more than £120,000 for voluntary aided schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The total amount of resources allocated in 1992-93 for minor works within the new range—£5,000 to £250,000—is £21 million. This compares with an allocation in 1991-92 of £6·7 million for minor works and £1·5 in respect of named major projects costing between £120,000 and £250,000.

Funds for minor works improvement projects are allocated to each local education authority and it is for them to determine which projects should be authorised. The Department has not prescribed the level of funds to be assigned to minor works projects costing more than £120,000.

SCOTLAND

Hospital Beds

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many beds were available in each health board area *(a)* in total and *(b)* for the care of the elderly, on 1 January; and what are the projected equivalent figures for April 1992.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The latest available information is shown in the table. Projected figures are not centrally available.

NHS hospitals—in Scotland; average available staffed beds[1]*; all specialties and care of the elderly; by health board; quarter ending 30 September 1991*

	All specialties[2]	*Geriatric*[3]
Scotland	48,692	17,814
Argyll and Clyde	3,945	1,492
Ayrshire and Arran	2,875	1,148
Borders	894	396
Dumfries and Galloway	1,357	550
Fife	2,912	1,147
Forth Valley	2,766	1,039
Grampian	5,070	2,038
Greater Glasgow	10,399	3,580
Highland	1,899	456
Lanarkshire	4,580	1,607
Lothian	7,008	2,569
Orkney	159	80
Shetland	146	86
Tayside	4,465	1,511
Western Isles	217	115

[1] Includes borrowed, lent and temporary beds.

[2] At any time, a varying proportion of acute beds is taken up by elderly patients.

[3] Geriatric assessment, geriatric long stay and phychogeriatrics.

Children (Special Needs)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children have had their record of special needs reviewed *(a)* in total and *(b)* under the statutory procedures, by the Greater Glasgow health board in each year since 1987.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is the responsibility of education authorities to keep under consideration the record of needs of all children and young persons in their area and to review their decision to open these records and the information entered on them whenever they consider it expedient to do so, or at the request of a parent of young person. Greater Glasgow health board has no statutory obligations in this connection.

A record of the number of reviews of records of needs undertaken by education authorities is not held centrally.

Young Offenders

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by name and by prison those young people since 1972 who have been detained without limit of time.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* The total number currently detained is 40, of whom nine are in young offenders institutions and 31 in prisons.

If the hon. Member requires the names and establishments of those currently detained, I shall be happy to write to him.

Under-fives

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the figures for 1991 for the percentage of under-fives in *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* nursery classes, *(c)* infant classes and *(d)* in total, by local education authority in Scotland, in rank order.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* Provisional information from the 1991 school census on the number and percentage of pupils in nursery schools and departments in Scotland is as follows. The school census does not collect a separate breakdown of pupils into nursery schools, nursery classes and infant classes.

Pupils in Education Authority Nursery Schools/Departments at September 1991 by Education Authority Area as a percentage of the estimated three and four-year-old age group

	Number of pupils	*Percentage of three and four year olds*
Fife	4,650	50·4
Lothian	8,800	47·8
Central	2,762	41·9
Shetland	241	36·1
Tayside	3,422	35·2
Strathclyde	19,221	31·4
Grampian	3,985	20·7
Dumfries and Galloway	835	23·6
Borders	489	20·3
Orkney	92	18·4
Highland	849	15·8
Western Isles	0	0·0
Scotland	45,346	34·5

Pressure Stock Licences

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of pressure stock licences attaching to fishing vessels in each port of registration *(a)* at the outset of the scheme and *(b)* at the most recent date for which information is available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The issue raised has been delegated to the chief executive of the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency and I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Weapons

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the current review of United Kingdom nuclear weapons safety includes an assessment of potential hazards during transportation and handling.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 19 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *153*.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where his Department plans to dispose of decommissioned nuclear submarines.

Mr. Alan Clark: Various options for the disposal of decommissioned nuclear submarines remain under consideration.

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve the procedures and practice of his Department in respect to the placing of contracts with small community-based suppliers, such as the Cardiff Institute for the Blind, and in respect to contracting procedures generally.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Ministry of Defence operates the provisions of the Government preference scheme in respect of priority suppliers, including the Cardiff Institute for the Blind. In essence this is designed to give such suppliers the opportunity to supply the widest possible range of the Ministry's requirements, but consistent with the need to consider value for the taxpayer's money.

We are constantly seeking to improve our procedures and practices, with the aim of improving value for money. The priority scheme apart, we do not in our contract procedures discriminate between suppliers of different size in our allocation of contracts. However, the practices employed have regard for the financial value of the contract concerned. Thus in general simplified procedures are employed for contracts of smaller value, and it is such contracts which are usually of most interest to small suppliers.

The MoD encourages new suppliers to make their capabilities known, and to this end have set up a new suppliers' service, with a small firms group within it, to help such concerns.

Military Sales

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang), *Official Report*, 6 December, column 272, if he will set out so much of the information requested on United Kingdom military sales that could be assembled without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) of 30 January, *Official Report*, column 655. I would be happy to write to the hon. Member also.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Mackerel

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will allocate an extra sectoral mackerel quota to the Falmouth mackerel handliners.

Mr. Curry: No. Allocations for 1992 will be based on track records as agreed by the industry. However, in view of the increase in the western mackerel total allowable catch for 1992, the allocation for the handliners this year should be about 1,900 tonnes, which is a 39 per cent. increase over the initial 1991 allocation of 1,365 tonnes.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that *(a)* all trawlers within the south-west mackerel box are inspected to ensure that they are not taking more than their allocated mackerel by-catch and *(b)* that any fishing boat within the south-west mackerel box is entitled to operate there.

Mr. Curry: During the mackerel fishery season normal levels of fishery inspection in the south-west mackerel box are stepped up with an additional fishery surveillance vessel being employed. Prosecutions are taken in the event of contraventions being found.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the south-west mackerel conservation box in protecting the dedicated mackerel fishery.

Mr. Curry: Research carried out last year by the Department indicated that there were a high percentage of juvenile mackerel present in the box. Both the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea and the European Community Commission's scientific and technical committee on fisheries recommended that the box should remain in place to protect this important element of the western mackerel stock. I welcome the European Community decision to make the box a permanent arrangement.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will take steps within the EC to ban industrial fishing within the south-west mackerel box.

Mr. Curry: There is at present no scientific evidence to suggest that the current level of permitted fishing in the south-west mackerel box causes damage to the mackerel stock. The situation is kept under constant review.

Spanish Fishing Boats

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about Spanish fishing boats registering in Gibraltar as United Kingdom fishing vessels.

Mr. Curry: It is not possible for fishing boat owners —whatever their nationality—to register their boats in Gibraltar as United Kingdom fishing vessels.

Water Quality

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a copy of the provisional classification of the water quality of shellfish harvesting areas.

Mr. Curry: EC directive 91/492/EEC sets out health conditions for the production and sale of live bivalve molluscs. With certain possible exemptions, those conditions are to be implemented by 1 January 1993.

It is first necessary to classify production areas according to the treatment required before the molluscs may be marketed. With the co-operation of local authorities and other interested bodies, we are collecting the necessary data in England and Wales and will publish the results when work is complete.

Pollution, Fal Estuary

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether current steps taken to control pollution are adequate for long-term protection of the local shellfish industry in the Fal estuary, Cornwall;

(2) what action he is taking to monitor pollution levels of shellfish in the Fal estuary, Cornwall.

Mr. Curry: Short-term measures to minimise the problems caused by the sudden discharge from the Wheal Jane mine on 13 January are in place. The National Rivers Authority is working with mine owners to find an effective long-term solution. This will be welcome to the local shellfish industry.

When the potential problems with the Wheal Jane mine became apparent last year, we established a monitoring programme involving testing samples of shellfish from the Fal Estuary for levels of metal contaminants. Results from samples tested since the discharge on 13 January show that, with the exception of a possible slight increase in zinc levels, the incident has not resulted in an increase in metal contaminants in shellfish. The levels continue to be below those that would give cause for concern on public health grounds. Our monitoring programme will continue.

Advisory Committees

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the advisory committees, coming under his Ministry, and concerned with public health whose members are requested to sign a declaration concerning the Official Secrets Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: None of the members of these independent MAFF advisory committees is required to sign any declaration under the Official Secrets Act 1989. The relevant committees are the Food Advisory

Committee, the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food, the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, the Veterinary Medicines Committee and the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes.

Grant Schemes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what sums were paid out by each of his divisional offices for each *(a)* agricultural subsidy scheme and *(b)* grant scheme available to farmers in 1991; and how many agreements were entered into for each grant scheme.

Mr. Curry: The information requested in respect of the principal grant and subsidy schemes available to farmers in 1991 is as follows:

	Environmentally sensitive areas		*Farm and conservation grant scheme*[1]	*Farm diversification grant scheme*		*Farm woodland scheme*		*Hill livestock compensatory allowances*[2]		*Sheep annual premium scheme*[3]		*Suckler cow premium scheme*[3]		*Set aside*	
Divisional office	*Total payments £000s*	*Agreements entered into*	*Total payments £000s*	*Total payments £000s*	*Applications approved*	*Total payments £000s*	*Applications approved*	*Total payments £000s*	*Number of claims paid*	*Total payments £000s*	*Number of claims paid*	*Total payments £000s*	*Number of claims paid*	*Total payments*[4] *£000s*	*Number of applications*[5]
South Western region															
Exeter	—	—	3,512	219	27	84	12	3,465	1,498	5,923	4,099	1,360	1,060	517	29
Gloucester	—	—	1,774	201	23	125	41	—	—	2,368	1,887	803	595	2,161	73
Taunton	1,170	778	2,975	132	19	48	12	1,313	343	2,726	2,118	754	628	615	24
Truro	490	186	1,322	166	21	15	2	1,083	772	2,332	1,741	1,072	929	255	19
Eastern region															
Chelmsford	—	—	635	65	13	54	12	—	—	338	339	224	200	1,668	70
Huntingdon	—	—	445	27	7	107	24	—	—	1,633	1,096	323	308	2,153	72
Lincoln	—	—	530	51	6	37	38	—	—	788	645	478	325	804	14
Norwich	4,444	1,293	778	101	13	205	56	—	—	715	714	569	440	1,697	68
Northern region															
Beverley	247	22	1,067	40	14	46	23	1,226	933	1,532	1,422	527	546	707	17
Carlisle	89	31	2,592	70	7	16	1	8,927	2,738	8,077	3,799	1,450	954	122	4
Newcastle	525	120	802	76	26	29	4	8,303	1,798	6,606	2,734	2,982	2,266	720	18
Northallerton	728	155	1,666	102	21	35	15	5,706	2,113	6,266	3,837	1,410	1,015	591	11
South Eastern region															
Guildford	31	23	903	27	9	59	13	—	—	1,445	1,198	646	493	1,608	36
Maidstone	937	199	706	147	18	25	4	—	—	2,719	1,812	389	388	1,852	42
Oxford	—	—	715	53	6	135	35	—	—	1,738	1,191	554	450	2,961	72
Midlands and Western region															
Crewe	832	228	4,836	100	23	36	13	2,398	1,517	4,715	3,750	1,060	950	466	30
Nottingham	688	55	1,342	77	12	40	19	1,449	948	3,092	2,399	841	811	820	26
Preston	—	—	2,797	77	4	—	1	2,263	1,373	2,757	2,021	989	487	137	4
Worcester	—	—	1,046	93	22	93	31	834	413	5,269	3,929	782	820	920	44

[1] Number of improvement plans approved under EC part of scheme is not available by Divisional Office. Overall total for the year was 336. Figures for total payments relate to both EC and national parts of the scheme. Figures for the new farm and conservation grant scheme 1991 are not yet available.

[2] Figures for payments and number of claims cover the period 1 January to 30 November 1991. December figures are not yet available.

[3] Figures relate to scheme year 1991 only.

[4] Five-year set-aside scheme payments made in calendar year 1991 (including payments made in that year for 1989-90 and 1990-91 scheme years).

[5] Based on applications to join the five-year set-aside scheme from 1 October 1991.

Spongiform Encephalopathies

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total number of individual animals by species excluding cattle in which spongiform encephalopathies have been confirmed in each of *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1991; and if he will indicate for each species the numbers believed to have contracted the disease by (i) vertical transmission, (ii) contaminated feeding stuff, (iii) transmission unknown or (iv) any other method.

Mr. Maclean: Naturally occurring spongiform encephalopathies in species other than cattle are not notifiable diseases. Nevertheless we are aware of the following cases in Great Britain confirmed by laboratory analysis:

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Cat	—	—	12	11
Arabian Oryx	—	1	—	—
Greater Kudu	—	1	1	1
Eland	—	1	—	2
Sheep	215	246	348	[1]894
Goats	not known	5	15	9

[1] Since 1991 reporting of cases of scrapie in sheep has been encouraged, to obtain material for spongiform encephalopathy research.

Epidemiological investigations were not carried out in the cases of scrapie, but it is considered to be transmissible both maternally and horizontally. Insufficient epidemiological data is available to draw firm conclusions on the other cases.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the locations of the refrigerated containers dedicated for the use of BSE carcases and controlled and monitored by his Ministry in the south-west of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: In addition to those at the two dedicated storage centres in Devon, there is a refrigeration container at an incineration plant in Gloucestershire and another in Avon which is used only in emergencies such as a breakdown at an incineration plant.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals have been agreed by the Council of Ministers to ensure that live animals or animal products originating from outside the country have been handled or processed in accordance with the Community's own regulations on welfare and hygiene; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Directive 91/628 on the protection of live animals during transport will provide that imports of animals from third countries shall be authorised only if the exporter and/or importer gives a written undertaking to comply with the requirements of the directive and has made arrangements to comply with them.

The directives on the welfare of pigs—91/630—and calves—91/629—will require animals imported from third countries to have been reared under at least equivalent conditions to those laid down in the directives.

Directive 90/675 will require member states to operate specific border checks to ensure that animal products imported from third countries comply with Community rules and national rules.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the policy on the maximum journey time which should be permitted for each species of food animal while being exported for slaughter.

Mr. Maclean: Directive 91/628 EEC on the protection of animals during transport provides for the Commission to propose maximum journey times for certain types of animal. This is to ensure that they do not travel for long periods without proper care including food and water. The hon. Member will be aware that our national arrangements provide for a maximum 12 to 15 hour interval between feeding and watering livestock during transport. In the Government's view this rule should be adopted throughout the Community.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposal to improve the standard of legislation, observance and enforcement of animal welfare between member states.

Mr. Maclean: The Government will continue to press for the high British standards of animal welfare to apply throughout the European Community. We have given full support to Commission proposals for establishing a Community inspectorate to ensure proper application of the legislation in all member states.

Feeding Stuffs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to improve surveillance of the animal feeding stuffs industry in the light of the proposed amendment to directive 74/63/EEC; and what is his estimate of the financial impact of this change on his Department and the industry.

Mr. Maclean: An independent expert group, appointed by the Government, is currently reviewing the regulatory framework covering the animal feedingstuffs industry, with particular reference to food safety aspects. The proposed amendment to directive 74/63/EEC is not expected to have a financial impact on the Department or directly on animal feedingstuffs manufacturers, who should receive additional safeguards regarding their raw materials.

Eggs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions, and in respect of how many eggs, action has been taken by his Department to refuse consignments of foreign produced eggs on the grounds of *(a)* salmonella infection and *(b)* either quality or health grounds.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not collected centrally.

ENERGY

Uranium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) *Official Report*, 23 January, columns *284–85*, where the outstanding three kilogrammes of enriched uranium, not accounted for by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's investigation, is thought to be; and if he will set out the areas where managerial improvements at Dounreay are recommended.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The conclusions and recommendations of the report are confidential to my Department and Euratom. However, the Atomic Energy Authority has accepted all the recommendations made in the investigation report and has taken action to implement them. Furthermore, I have asked my officials to monitor implementation of the report's recommendations by the Atomic Energy Authority.

HEALTH

Hormone Therapy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per week of a course of growth hormone therapy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The average cost per week of a course of growth hormone therapy varies because dosage is related to the patient's weight. The estimated cost per week in September 1991 of treating a child weighing 40kg was between £183 and £192 per week, depending on the brand of hormone used.

European Year of Elderly People

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department is making for the European year of elderly people and solidarity between the generations in 1993.

Mr. Dorrell: We are well advanced with our plans for the European year, in co-operation with the Department of Social Security. Following consultation with a wide range of national voluntary and professional bodies, statutory authorities and other relevant Government Departments, we have set up a group to advise on the conduct, promotion and evaluation of the programme in the United Kingdom. The group involves representatives of a wide range of organisations reflecting the interests of older people, including the National Pensioners Convention, and will take direct account wherever possible of the views and preferences of older people themselves. The programme in the United Kingdom will focus on four major themes:

Combating "agism" and promoting positive images of ageing;

Volunteering;

Health promotion and active leisure, including remaining mentally active;

Social integration, including problems of isolation and loneliness, information needs, and housing issues.

Four task groups are being set up to examine each of these themes. Their remit will outline the aims and activities to be achieved over the 12 months, with particular reference wherever appropriate to intergenerational and multicultural aspects.

Age Concern England—the National Council on Ageing will be responsible for the overall co-ordination of the official programme and the dissemination of news and information. The Department is providing funds for the costs of a secretariat for this purpose and has already committed £25,000 in the current year.

Magnetic Resonance Imagers

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), 3 December 1991, *Official Report*, column 128, if he will set out the terms of his letter in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Waldegrave: The text of my letter is as follows:

> "During Health Questions on 3 December I said I would write with details of the number of magnetic resonance imagers available in England and Wales.
>
> At present there are 45 magnetic resonance scanners in use in England and Wales, 13 of these are in the private sector but all can be used for NHS patients if the health authority and the 'owner' agree. That, of course, was never feasible under the old funding system of the NHS.
>
> There was a grand total of two machines in England and Wales in 1979; both in experimental stage and not available for routine NHS use. I think you have helped me to draw attention to yet another area of rapid growth in the NHS under this Government!"

Homoeopathic Hospitals

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting time at national health service homoeopathic hospitals for *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Waiting time information on individual hospitals is not collected centrally.

Trent Regional Health Authority (Contracts)

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants employed by Trent regional health authority are *(a)* on full-time contracts and *(b)* on maximum part-time contracts; and what plans he has to end part-time contracts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are currently 753 full-time and 411 part-time consultants—medical and dental—employed by Trent regional health authority. There are no plans to end part-time contracts.

Regional Alcohol Co-ordinators

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he decided to create or support the creation of the post of regional alcohol co-ordinator for each regional health authority in England;

(2) how much money has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent by his Department to fund the appointment of regional alcohol co-ordinators in each regional health authority in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93, respectively;

(3) to date, how many regional alcohol co-ordinator posts have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* appointed for regional health authority areas in England; and if he will list the regional health authorities where a regional alcohol co-ordinator has been appointed and the date of first appointment in each case.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government's intention to fund a regional alcohol misuse co-ordinator post in each regional health authority in England was announced in the interdepartmental circular HN(89)4, a copy of which is available in the Library, on "Alcohol Misuse" issued in February 1989. Co-ordinators were appointed in all 14 regions between October 1989 and February 1990. The amount of money allocated to each regional health authority in 1990-91 was £[illegible]6,000. Two regions, Northern and North West Thames, received half their 1990-91 allocation because during that year alcohol misuse was only a part of their co-ordinators' responsibilities. All the money allocated was spent. From 1991-92 onwards funding for regional alcohol misuse co-ordinator posts has been built into health authorities' baselines and is not therefore identified separately. It does, however, attract annual uplifting for inflation.

Abortion

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by regional health authority area, the places approved by him under section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967, indicating which of these places has been approved *(a)* to provide early medical abortion using Mifegyne and *(b)* to carry out terminations after the 20th week of pregnancy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The table provides the information requested. Clinics approved to provide early medical abortion are marked (A) and those approved to carry out late termination up to 24 weeks are marked (B).

PLACES APPROVED UNDER SECTION 1(3) OF THE ABORTION ACT 1967—BY REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

Region and Approved Places

Northern

Cleveland and Nuffield Hospital, Junction Road, Norton, Stockton-on-Tees TS20 1QB.

Newcastle Nuffield, Clayton Road, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NU2 1JP

Yorkshire

BUPA Belvedere Hospital, Belvedere Road, Scarborough YO11 2UT

BUPA Hospital Hull and East Riding, Lowfield Road, Anlaby, Hull HU10 7AZ

Duchy House Nuffield, Queen's Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire HG2 0HF

Fallodon Private Surgical Hospital, 4 Allerton Park, Leeds LS7 4ND

Fulford Grange Hospital, Micklefield Lane, Rawdon, Leeds LS19 6BA

Hull Nuffield Hospital, Westbourne Avenue, Hull, Humberside HU5 3HP

Yorkshire Clinic, Bradford Road, Bingley, West Yorkshire BD16 1TW

Trent

AMI Park Hospital, Sherwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, Nottingham NG5 8RX

Bromhead Hospital, Nettleham Road, Lincoln LN2 1QU

BUPA Hospital, Leicester, Gartree Road, Oadby, Leicester LE2 2FF

Danum Lodge Nursing Home, 123 Thorne Road, Doncaster DN2 5BQ (A)

Doncaster Independent Hospital, 51 Bawtry Road, Bessacarr, Doncaster DN4 7AA

Leicester Nuffield Clinic, Scraptoft Lane, Leicester LE5 1HY

Parkfield Private Hospital, Parkfield Road, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S65 2AJ

Tapton Cliffe Clinic, 276 Fulwood Road, Sheffield S10 3BN

East Anglia

BUPA Hospital Norwich, Old Watton Road, Colney, Norwich NR4 7TD

Christchurch Park Hospital, 57 Fonnereau Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 3JN

Evelyn Hospital, Trumpington Road, Cambridge CB2 2AF

Fitzwilliam Hospital, Milton Way, South Bretton, Peterborough PE3 8YQ

Sandringham Private Hospital, Gayton Road, Kings Lynn, Norfolk PE30 4HU

North West Thames

BUPA Hospital Bushey, Heathbourne Road, Bushey, Watford, Hertfordshire WD2 7RD

Chatsworth Clinic, 76-78 Park Road, New Barnet, Hertfordshire EN4 9QT

Clementine Churchill Hospital, Sudbury Hill, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 3RX

Garden Hospital, 46-50 Sunny Gardens Road, Hendon, London NW4 7RX

Park View Clinic, 87 Mattock Lane, Ealing, London W5 5BJ (A) (B)

Royal Masonic Hospital, Ravenscourt Park, London W6 0TN

North East Thames

AMI Portland Hospital, 209 Great Portland Street, London W1N 6AH

BPAS St. Anns, St. Anns Hospital, St. Anns Road, London N15 3TH (A)

Fairfield Nursing Home, 88 Russell Road, Buckhurst Hill, Essex IG9 5BQ

Humana Hospital Wellington, Wellington Place, London NW8

Marie Stopes Nursing Home, 10 Manstone Road, London NW2 3XG (A)

South East Thames

AMI Blackheath Hospital, 40-42 Lee Terrace, London SE3 9UD

AMI Chaucer Hospital, Nackington Road, Canterbury, Kent CT4 7AR

Avenue Clinic, 14 New Church Road, Hove, Sussex BN3 4FE

BUPA Alexandra Hospital, Impton Lane, Walderslade, Kent ME5 9PG

Leigham Private Clinic, 76 Leigham Court Road, London SW16 2QA (B)

Raleigh Nursing Home, 1A Raleigh Gardens, Brixton Hill, London, SW2 6AB (A) (B)

Wistons Nursing Home, 138 Dyke Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 5PA (A) (B)

South West Thames

BUPA Hospital Clare Park, Crondall Lane, Crondall, Farnham, Surrey GU10 5DT

New Victoria Hospital, 184 Coombe Lane West, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7EG

Rosslyn Nursing Home, 15-17 Rosslyn Road, East Twickenham, Middlesex TW1 2AR (A) (B)

Woking Nuffield Hospital, Shores Road, Woking, Surrey GU21 4BY

Wessex

Bath Clinic, Claverton Down Road, Coombe Down, Bath BA2 7BE

BUPA Chalybeate Hospital, Chalybeate Close, Tremona Road, Southampton, Hants SO9 4AX

BUPA Hospital Portsmouth, Bartons Road, Havant, Hants PO9 5NP

Dean Park Nursing Home, 23-25 Ophir Road, Bournemouth, Dorset BH8 8LS (A)

Hampshire Clinic, Basing Road, Basingstoke, Hants RG24 0AL

New Hall Hospital, Bodenham, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 4EY

Sarum Road Private Hospital, Sarum Road, Winchester, Hants SO22 5HA

Winterbourne Hospital, Herrington Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 2DR

Oxford

The Acland Nuffield Hospital, Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PD

Foscote Private Hospital, Foscote Rise, Banbury, OX16 9XP

South Western
BUPA Hospital Bristol, Redland Hill, Durdham Downs, Bristol, BS6 7JJ

Chesterfield Nuffield Hospital, Clifton Hill, Bristol, BS8 1BP

Duchy Hospital, Penventinnie Lane, Treliske, Truro, TR1 3UP

Exeter Nuffield Hospital, Wonford Road, Exeter EX2 4UG

Plymouth Nuffield Hospital, Derriford Road, Derriford, Plymouth PL6 8BG

Somerset Nuffield Hospital, Staplegrave Elm, Taunton, Somerset TA2 6AN

West Midlands
Blackdown Nursing Home, Old Milverton Lane, Blackdown, Leamington Spa CV32 6RW (A)

BUPA South Bank Hospital, 139 Bath Road, Worcester WR5 3AG

Calthorpe Nursing Home, 4 Arthur Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2UL (A)

Droitwich Private Hospital, St. Andrews Road, Droitwich, Worcestershire WR9 8EA

Robert Nursing Home, 162 Station Road, Kings Norton, Birmingham B30 1DB (A) (B)

Salop Nuffield Hospital, Longden Road, Shrewsbury SY3 9DP

Wye Valley Nuffield Hospital, Venns Lane, Hereford HR1 1DF

Mersey
BUPA Murrayfield Hospital, Holmwood Drive, Thingwall, Wirral, Merseyside L61 1AU

BUPA North Cheshire Hospital, Fir Tree Close, Stretton, Warrington, Cheshire WA4 4LU

Merseyside Nursing Home, 32 Parkfield Road, Liverpool L17 8UJ (A)

North Western
AMI Alexandra Hospital, Mill Lane, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 2PX

Gisburn Park Private Hospital, Gisburn, Clitheroe, Lancashire BB7 4HX

Highfield Private Hospital, Manchester Road, Rochdale OL11 4LX

South Manchester Private Clinic, 136 Chester Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport SK7 6HE (A)

(A)—Approved to provide early medical abortion.
(B)—Approved to carry out late terminations up to 24 weeks.

Cervical Screening

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the total amount of expenditure on his Department's cervical screening programme for the most recent available year and outline the various elements, such as general practitioner remuneration, concerned.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: General practitioners receive payments for achieving specific targets for cervical cancer screening; the total expenditure on these in 1990-91 was £40 million. No central estimate is made of the cost of the other main elements of the cervical screening programme: the laboratory examination of smears, or the administration of the arrangements for inviting women for screening.

Hospital Car Service

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the health service of the hospital car service in each of the last three years; and what is the estimated cost of running an alternative transport service.

Mr. Dorrell: The total cost to the NHS of the hospital car service in each of the last three years is given in the table.

No cost estimate is possible for an alternative service for which no plans exist.

Expenditure on Hospital Car Service

	£,000
1988-89	9,659
1989-90	10,279
1990-91	11,332

Health Promotion Clinics

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total level of payments to general practitioners for running health promotion clinics since the introduction of the new contract.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The total amount paid to general practitioners for running health promotion clinics between 1 April 1990 and 30 September 1991 was £63 million.

Psychiatric Prisons

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many long-stay prisoners in psychiatric prisons were discharged into the care of either *(a)* the NHS, *(b)* the local authority or *(c)* voluntary or private care in each year since 1980; and how many of these prisoners were subsequently re-admitted.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The information which is available relating to patients discharged from special hospitals is set out in the table. Full details of the type of care to which special hospital patients are discharged are not routinely collected by the Special Hospitals Service Authority and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Year	*Transferred to NHS hospitals*	[1] *Discharged*	[2] *Re-admissions to special hospitals*
1980	146	80	38
1981	219	81	43
1982	133	89	35
1983	144	71	35
1984	112	97	36
1985	104	96	33
1986	80	47	51
1987	95	47	23
1988	101	50	20
1989	125	43	21
1990	85	54	22

[1] Including repatriations. Figures relating to years 1980-85 include remittances to prison.

[3] Re-admissions from all sources (community, NHS hospital, court, prison).
Re-admissions do not necessarily relate to the same year as transfer or discharge.

Falkland Islands (Ultraviolet Light)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department has made available, or plans to make available, to residents of the Falkland Islands and visitors to them, regarding the possible health effects of exposure to ultraviolet light.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I have been asked to reply.

The Falkland Islands Government are responsible for health matters in the Falkland Islands. They have not sought such advice from Her Majesty's Government.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Retirement Pension

11. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the current value of the basic state pension for *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* married couple pensioners in 1980; and what is the comparable figure for 1992, uprated for each year in line with the increase in average earnings.

Miss Widdecombe: This April the basic retirement pension will be uprated to £54·15 for a single person and £86·70 for a married couple. Uprating by average earnings since 1980 would imply weekly rates of £68·65 and £109·60 respectively from April which would cost a man on average earnings and his employer £9·40 per week between them in extra national insurance contributions.

16. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current level of the married couple's retirement pension and the corresponding figure for 1979, updated by reference to annual increases in prices and average male adult earnings, whichever was the greater.

Miss Widdecombe: The current weekly level of basic retirement pension for a married couple is £83·25. The calculation for which the hon. Member asks would give a figure of £105·40, and would entail an increase of £8·70 per week in the national insurance contributions payable by a man on average earnings and his employer.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of raising the basic state pension in 1992-93 to *(a)* £60 per week for single people, £96 per week for married couples and *(b)* £59·15 per week for single people, £94·70 per week for married couples, on the basis that the increased pensions were paid to all regardless of contributory record.

Miss Widdecombe: The extra cost to the national insurance fund of providing a flat rate basic retirement pension to all Great Britain residents of state pension age or over to replace all other flat rate contributory benefits in 1992-93 would be *(a)* £4·3 billion and *(b)* £3·9 billion. There would be some off-setting savings on expenditure on income-related benefits.

The combined weekly cost in extra national insurance contributions of these changes to a man on average earnings and his employer would be *(a)* £6 and *(b)* £5·50.

Invalid Care Allowance

17. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the rules governing invalid care allowance.

Mr. Scott: Subject to parliamentary approval, from April we intend to increase the earnings disregard for invalid care allowance from £30 to £40 a week. This will enable more carers to enjoy the advantages of a link with the world of work.

Attendance and Mobility Allowances

18. **Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what improvements have been made to attendance allowance and mobility allowance in the last two years.

Mr. Scott: We have made a number of significant improvements: in 1990 we extended attendance allowance to the under-twos and gave automatic and immediate entitlement to the higher rate for people who are terminally ill. These measures have brought help to over 80,000 people to date at an annual cost of over £40 million. We also ensured entitlement to mobility allowance for people who are both deaf and blind and for people without both legs. From April 1992 disability living allowance will bring further important improvements to the help currently available.

25. **Dame Jill Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes have been made to attendance allowance and mobility allowance in the last two years.

Mr. Scott: We have made a number of significant improvements: for attendance allowance, in 1990 we extended entitlement to the under twos and, for people who are terminally ill, we made entitlement to the higher rate automatic and abolished the six-month qualifying period. In the same year we made regulations to ensure entitlement to mobility allowance for people who are both deaf and blind, and in 1991 we made entitlement automatic for people without both legs. From April 1992, disability living allowance will replace and extend the help currently available through attendance allowance for people disabled before age 65 and mobility allowance. Attendance allowance will remain for people whose disabilities start after that age.

Pensioners

19. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on targeting help towards particularly needy pensioner groups.

Miss Widdecombe: In April 1992 the benefit payable to low income pensioners will be uprated by 7 per cent.—nearly 3 per cent. more than the retail prices index. In addition to this, pensioners aged 80 and over, and younger disabled pensioners in receipt of income related benefits, will receive further increases worth £60 million in a full year.

This brings the total extra help to pensioners in receipt of income related benefits to some £335 million a year above normal upratings over the last two and a half years.

Child Benefit

20. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many increases in child benefit have been announced *(a)* in the past 18 months and *(b)* in the preceding three years.

Mr. Jack: In the past 18 months we have announced three increases in child benefit. In the preceding three years, help was channeled into benefits designed to assist low-income families with the result that overall resources available to families with children are now greater than if child benefit had simply been uprated throughout the period.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of raising each of the two rates of child benefit by £1 per week in 1992-93.

Mr. Jack: On the basis of the latest available information, it is estimated that the gross cost would be around £640 million, and the net cost about £450 million.

Family Credit

21. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of families receiving family credit; and how many families were receiving family income supplement in 1979.

Mr. Jack: In October 1991, a total of 348,000 families were receiving family credit compared with 78,000 receiving family income supplement in April 1979.

Private Nursing Homes

22. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to revise the arrangements governing the payment of income support to those in private nursing homes; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to revise the way income support is paid before the full implementation of community care in April 1993.

Income Support

23. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the level of income support for families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Miss Widdecombe: We receive many representations, including a number about the benefit arrangements for people who live in board and lodging accommodation. We keep these arrangements under review and have taken steps to make them more efficient and fair.

Disability Benefits

26. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to publicise the new disability benefits that come into effect later in the current year.

Mr. Scott: We are planning a carefully targeted and comprehensive publicity campaign for the two new benefits—disability living allowance and disability working allowance—with the help of disabled people and their organisations. The plans include a major national television campaign starting in early February, supported by more detailed advertisements in the national press. In addition we are writing more than 1 million letters to all existing beneficiaries of attendance allowance and mobility allowance to let them know about the existing benefit changes and how to claim extra help, if appropriate. We have commissioned a series of 12 programmes about the new benefits entitled "The Way Ahead", on the BBC select out-of-hours service. The programmes, which started on 21 January, are aimed primarily at advisers and carers of disabled people. We are also writing to health professionals such as doctors and nurses to let them know about the changes.

Pensioners (Income)

27. **Sir Gerard Vaughan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners are in the top half of the income distribution; and what were the comparable figures for 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: I am pleased to tell the House that 28 per cent. of pensioners were in the top half of the total income distribution compared with only 24 per cent. in 1979.

National Insurance

28. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the weekly burden of national insurance contributions on someone on one and a half times male average earnings.

Mr. Jack: Currently someone earning £490 a week pays £31·46 in national insurance contributions. If there were no upper earnings limit, a married man earning this amount would lose a further £9 off typical take-home pay of £360 a week.

Low-income Families

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what extra help, over and above normal upratings, has been made available to help low-income families since 1987.

Mr. Jack: The restructuring of the income-related benefits in 1988 enabled extra help to be directed at low income families and from April this will be worth more than £600 million a year in real terms.

State Earnings-related Pensions

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the operation of SERPS.

Mr. Jack: The state earnings-related pension scheme —SERPS—is operating satisfactorily and more than 3 million pensioners are in receipt of an additional pension from SERPS. The scheme is now on a sound financial footing and future generations should be able to meet the state's pension commitments in the next century.

Hours of Work

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of *(a)* income support and *(b)* housing benefit during 1991 had their benefit reduced by the presence of non-dependants; and how many of these were (i) working more than 24 hours a week, (ii) working between 16 and 24 hours a week and (iii) working less than 16 hours.

Miss Widdecombe: Data drawn from the 1990 housing benefit management information statistics and the 1990 annual statistical inquiry indicate that the number of beneficiaries whose benefit is calculated to take account of the presence of non-dependants and the associated number of non-dependants on 31 May 1990 were as follows:

	Income Support	*Housing Benefit*
Number of claimants	30,000	350,000
Number of non-dependants	38,000	510,000

Information on hours worked by non-dependants is not available from these sources. However, modelling using data drawn from the 1986-88 family expenditure surveys uprated to 1991-92 prices and benefit levels suggest that the proportions of non-dependants working for the hours stated would be:

Non-dependants who give rise to a non-dependant deduction: estimated percentage working stated hours per week

	Claimants benefit	
Hours worked	*Income support*	*Housing benefit*
Less than 16	32	38
16-23	1	6
24 or more	67	56

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what amendments he is considering to the disability working allowance scheme before it is introduced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) earlier today.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the new disability working allowance comes into operation.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wealdon (Sir G. Johnson Smith) earlier today.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* pensioner households, *(b)* families with children and *(c)* other households who are tenants of (i) local authorities and new towns, (ii) housing associations and (iii) other landlords, are estimated to be receiving *(x)* maximum housing benefit with no deductions for dependants, *(y)* maximum housing benefit but with deductions for non-dependants and *(z)* a lesser amount of housing benefit, towards their rent payments at May 1990 and May 1991, in Great Britain as a whole, and in each region for which figures are available; and what proportion of the total number of tenants in each category they represent.

Miss Widdecombe: The available estimates for May 1990 are as follows:

Housing benefit—Great Britain

	(i) Local authority tenants			*(ii) and (iii) Private and housing association tenants*		
Premium	*(a)* *Pensioner*	*(b)* *Family*	*(c)* *Other*	*(a)* *Pensioner*	*(b)* *Family*	*(c)* *Other*
(x) Maxmimum benefit	723,00	530,000	416,000	235,000	132,000	273,000
(y) Maximum with non-dependant deduction	101,000	32,000	71,000	12,000	4,000	9,000
(z) Other lesser amount	812,000	78,000	165,000	186,000	21,000	196,000

Notes:

(1) Fifty-seven per cent. of local authority tenants receive housing benefit, of which 32 per cent. are pensioners, 13 per cent. are families and 13 per cent. other.

(2) Forty-seven per cent. of private and housing association tenants receive housing benefit, of which 19 per cent. are pensioners, 7 per cent. families and 21 per cent. other.

(3) Estimates of regional figures are unreliable.

(4) May 1991 information is not yet available.

Source: Housing Benefit Management Information System.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will change the rules on housing benefit so that a local authority that successfully uncovers a fraud does not lose subsidy.

Miss Widdecombe: A local authority which successfully detects fraud and recovers wrongly paid benefit need not lose financially. It receives partial subsidy on the overpayment and retains all the money it recovers. If an authority received the same full rate of subsidy for fraudulent housing benefit awards as for legitimate ones, there would be little if any financial incentive to put resources into verifying new claims. Under the present rules, however, authorities have an incentive to scrutinise claims carefully because they will receive less subsidy if fraud is subsequently detected. In addition, as the partial subsidy made on a fraudulent payment is retained, authorities have a financial incentive to put resources into recovery.

Concession Cards

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce an over-60s concession card in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The United Kingdom, together with all other member states, is currently considering the implementation of a Communitywide over-60s card in accordance with the EC recommendation of May 1989 While the United Kingdom has declared itself in favour of the proposal, if it can be made to work effectively throughout the Community, some countries still have reservations about the scheme. The Department is continuing discussions with officials of the Commission and other member states in an effort to resolve outstanding problems.

I recently wrote to Members of the European Parliament about this matter and I will send the hon. Member a copy of the letter.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will issue instructions concerning cold weather payments to ensure all Bradford postcode areas are covered by the same weather centre; if he will ensure that all those eligible to the payment in Bradford are paid for the period 7 December to 13 December and for any period since, when only some people living in Bradford postcode areas have received payment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The cold weather payments scheme is based on a system which ensures that the weather in all parts of the country is monitored by an appropriate weather station. Payments cannot be made for an area covered by a weather station that did not register temperatures cold enough to trigger a payment under the regulations, but all payments due under the social fund cold weather regulations have been, or will be made shortly.

Social Fund Inspectors

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many social fund inspectors were employed on 31 December;

(2) how many applications for review by a social fund inspector were outstanding for more than one month on 31 December.

Mr. Scott: I am informed by the Social Fund Commissioner that on 31 December 1991, there were 64 social fund inspectors—SFIs—employed and 3,463 review applications outstanding for more than one month. A further eight SFIs started work on 6 January 1992. They are currently undergoing training.

Financial and Management Information System

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *286*, what developments have taken place in his use of FAMIS during his tenure as Secretary of State; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Development of the early phases of the financial and management information system, commenced in October 1990 and they are on target for implementation to begin in April 1992. Meanwhile, the Department has developed interim resource management facilities to improve budget and work control and has introduced a devolved personnel management system.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 February 1992

TRANSPORT

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what data on radioactive materials transported into and within the United Kingdom is routinely collected by his Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: Data supplied about consignments of radioactive materials that have to be notified to the Department of Transport before shipment were detailed in the reply given to the Hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) on 29 January.

Macclesfield Relief Road

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work on the new north-south relief road in Macclesfield to be completed.

Mr. Chope: I expect the section of road between Flash lane and Hibel road to open to traffic on 10 February. Work on the remaining section between Hibel road and Mill lane should be completed shortly after Easter.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the reasons for the delay in completing the new north-south relief road in Macclesfield.

Mr. Chope: Additional contract works, difficulties with the diversion of statutory undertakers apparatus and the late delivery of the Middlewood way footbridge are the main reasons for the delay in completion.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which supplier was commissioned by his Department to provide the Middlewood way footbridge for the north-south relief road in Macclesfield; at what cost this contract was placed; when it will be fulfilled; and why it was late in delivery.

Mr. Chope: The Middlewood way footbridge was included in the Department's contract for the relief road with Fairclough Civil Engineering at an estimated cost of £370,000. I expect work on the bridge to be completed in the next two weeks. The reasons for the delay in delivery are matters between Fairclough's and its suppliers.

Lorry Drivers (Diabetes)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many lorry drivers who treat their diabetes by injections of insulin have had their HGV licences revoked since April 1991.

Mr. Chope: Forty insulin treated drivers had their large goods vehicle—previously HGV—licence entitlement revoked between August and December last year. Prior to that, no manual or computer summary record was kept of the numbers of insulin revocations.

Motor Taxation

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total revenue raised from motor taxation in each year from 1979 to 1992; and what is the estimated revenue for 1992-93.

Mr. Rifkind: The figures are as follows:

Motoring Taxation (United Kingdom)

£ million

	Vehicle Excise Duty	*Fuel Duty*	*Total*
1979-80	1,162	2,667	3,829
1980-81	1,360	3,338	4,698
1981-82	1,618	4,425	6,043
1982-83	1,840	5,030	6,870
1983-84	1,997	5,414	7,411
1984-85	2,264	5,871	8,135
1985-86	2,426	6,253	8,679
1986-87	2,520	7,302	9,822
1987-88	2,599	7,651	10,250
1988-89	2,767	8,501	11,268
1989-90	2,948	8,556	11,504
1990-91	2,923	9,455	12,378
1991-92	[1]2,957	[1]11,000	[1]13,957

[1] Revenue for 1992-93 will depend on tax rates in that year.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the arrangements similar to United Kingdom vehicle excise duty applicable in each of the other countries of the European Community.

Mr. Chope: Information on the vehicle taxes imposed by other EC countries can be found in "World Road Statistics 1986-1990", published by the International Road Federation. A copy is held in the Library.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the categories of vehicle in respect of which vehicle excise duty is chargeable; what is the current rate for each such category; when was the most recent change in respect of each category; what was the previous rate; and what was the revenue derived from each such category in the latest convenient period.

Mr. Chope: The categories and current rates are set out in Form V149, available from post offices and vehicle registration offices. I attach a copy for my hon. Friend.

For road taxation revenue purposes, these categories fall into five vehicle classes. The estimated VED revenue for each is published in "The allocation of road track costs 1991/91", a copy of which is available in the Library.

The 12-montly rate for cars and light vans was £90 prior to 1985. Rates for motor cycles were increased by between £5 and £10 in 1991. The tax structure for taxis, buses and coaches was reorganised in 1989, with increases of between £47·50 and £395 related to passenger-carrying capacity.

The VED structure for goods vehicles exceeding 3·5 tonnes was simplified in 1990, involving increases in rates of between £20 and £470 for 140,000 lorries and reductions of between £30 and £570 for 3,800 vehicles. Rates for 320,000 lorries remained the same. The "other vehicles" class comprises recovery vehicles, special machines—mobile cranes, and so on—and "special types"—exceptionally large or heavy vehicles. The rate for recovery vehicles was increased by £25 and the rate for special machines by £14 in 1991. The rate for "special types" was increased in 1990 by £150.

Motorway Services

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that Mercury telephone boxes are installed at all motorway service areas in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chope Leases for motorway service areas—MSAs—in England, require as a standard the provision of public telephones. The choice of supplier is a matter for the MSA operator. MSAs in Wales and Scotland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland respectively.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made towards *(a)* increasing competition in the provision of services on motorways and *(b)* increasing the number of service areas on motorways.

Mr. Chope: The citizens charter announced the Government's intention to deregulate the provision of motorway service areas with the aim of providing more services more quickly. Detailed proposals will be announced shortly.

Norwich Southern Bypass

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) who specified the mix of materials which has been found to be faulty in the construction of the Norwich southern bypass; and if *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the consulting engineers or *(c)* the contractors are liable for the resulting cost;

(2) what is the estimate of the cost of remedial work on the Norwich southern bypass following the discovery of a faulty mix of materials in its construction.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* The Department's specification for highway works which incorporates British standards is used on all its trunk road contracts including Norwich southern bypass. It lays down criteria for road materials which allow contractors and suppliers a wide choice to encourage the use of local and low cost sources of raw materials to minimise transportation and environmental costs. At Norwich each of the four contracts is using a different combination of ingredients for the bituminous mix. The sources of supply for each varies and some local Norfolk aggregates are being used.

The particular combinations of aggregates and bituminous binder used in the heavy duty macadam exhibited unexpected deformation causing a suspension of work while the possible causes were investigated.

Adjustments have been made to the mixes within the British standard to provide a material which has greater resistance to deformation.

The extent and apportionment of any additional costs will be resolved under the terms of the contract.

Present indications are that the completed bypass will be opened to traffic by the original contract completion date.

HOME DEPARTMENT

External Frontiers Convention

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the external frontiers convention with the universal declaration of human rights, the international covenant on civil and political rights, the European convention on human rights, ILO conventions 97 and 143, the Helsinki final act and the Paris charter and the Council of Europe social charter.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no reason to believe that the draft external frontiers convention, signature of which has been held up by disagreement with the Spanish Government over a provision concerning application to Gibraltar, is in breach of any of the United Kingdom's international obligations.

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the external frontiers convention with the European convention on the legal status of migrant workers and the international convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and their families.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The United Kingdom is not a party to either of the conventions on migrant workers.

Working Men's Club (Membership Application)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate the allegation that applications for membership of a Birmingham working men's club featured in the recent Commission for Racial Equality case were made without the applicant's knowledge; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The conduct of formal investigations and the issuing of non-discrimination notices are matters for the Commission for Racial Equality.

Births (Airports)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children since 1981 have been born in the departure lounges of airports at *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick, *(c)* Leeds/Bradford and *(d)* Manchester; and how many such babies were affected by provisions of the British Nationality Act 1981.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office does not keep records of how many children were born in airport departure lounges, but any child born in such a place would be affected by the British Nationality Act 1981, section 1 of which determines whether or not the child has acquired British citizenship by birth.

Mentally Disordered (Press Coverage)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he received a copy of the Matthew Trust report on the Press Complaints Commission and BBC regarding media coverage of the mentally disordered and distressed; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend received the report on 14 January. He has noted its conclusions and the director of the Matthew Trust will be receiving a reply shortly.

Prison Ships

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he has given to the reintroduction of prison ships; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: On Monday 3 February, there were 1,221 prisoners held in police cells. My right hon. Friend has asked the prison service to examine a range of options for reducing this number. Among other possibilities, officials will be investigating the use abroad of floating facilities to house prisoners. However, we have no plans at this stage to introduce such facilities here.

Births (British Citizens)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children born in the United Kingdom since 1981 are not British citizens.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not available.

Spring Hill Prison

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether following the recent escape from Springfield prison he will institute an immediate inquiry into security at the prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to Spring Hill prison.

The prisoner who absconded from Spring Hill prison on 5 December 1991 has now been recaptured. Security at Spring Hill is appropriate for an open prison. The allocation of prisoners to open prisons always carries with it an element of risk.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he proposes to introduce electronic tagging of offenders under the Criminal Justice Act 1991;

(2) what progress has been made towards implementation of electronic tagging of offenders.

Mr. John Patten: Our proposals will be announced shortly.

International Criminals

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now take steps to ensure that international criminals serve their sentences in a high security environment.

Mrs. Rumbold: Offences committed abroad are already taken into account in the categorisation and allocation process. That process is set out in circular instruction 7/1988, a copy of which is in the Library.

Prison Closures

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has reached a decision as to *(a)* whether Warrington young offenders institution and *(b)* which other prison department establishments, are to close following the estate review 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 30 January at column *647*.

Prison Security

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now implement all recent recommendations for improving prison security.

Mrs. Rumbold: Chapter 2 of the White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice", Cm 1647, set out the Government's plans for improving security in prison service establishments. Those plans are being implemented. As to the recent report of an audit of security in prison service establishments holding category A prisoners, conducted by Mr. Ronald Hadfield and Mr. Gordon Lakes, I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 16 December 1991 at column *13*.

European Year of Elderly People

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home department what plans his Department is making for the European year of elderly people and solidarity between the generations in 1993.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is leading the Government's work on this, in conjunction with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security: I refer my hon. friend to his reply. He is drawing up plans in consultation with a wide range of national voluntary and professional bodies, statutory authorities and other relevant Government Departments.

Immigration Rules (Marriages)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the procedures followed by registrars who conduct marriages so as to ensure that there is no evasion of immigration rules.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

Superintendent registrars are statutory officers exercising functions under the Marriage and Registration Acts under the direction of the Registrar General. They are not immigration officers. If a superintendent registrar has good reason to suspect that the proposed marriage of a person from abroad has been arranged for the sole purpose of evading statutory immigration controls he/she is instructed to report the facts to the Registrar General. If the Registrar General is satisfied that the marriage is purely one of convenience then the facts will be passed on to the Home Office.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Civil Servants

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what departments and numbers of civil servants are due to be relocated to the north-west in future plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The table lists, with likely timings, the plans which departments have announced for relocating or locating civil service jobs away from the south-east which have still to be implemented or completed.

Department and Dispersal location	*Number of posts*	*Likely timing*
Inland Revenue, Birkenhead	170	1992
Social Security Child Support Agency, Birkenhead	500	1993
Customs and Excise, Liverpool	1,301	1990-95
Customs and Excise, Manchester	390	1990-95
Employment Group, Runcorn	613	1990-93
Employment Group, Bootle	61	1992
Land Registry, Birkenhead	110	1992-93
Total number of posts	3,145	

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by department the number of civil service jobs to be relocated in the west midlands, specifying the geographic location of the areas to which they will move and detailing the dates upon which it is planned to make these relocations.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Department of Social Security and the Home Office have announced plans for relocating or locating civil service jobs in the west midlands which have yet to be implemented. The Department of Social Security will be opening a Child Support Agency Office in Dudley from 1 April 1993, creating 500 new administrative jobs. The Home Office will be relocating 12 posts from the forensic science service to Birmingham within the next 18 months.

Income Tax

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much 1p on the basic rate of income tax would yield in 1992-93 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales.

Mr. Maude: Increasing the basic rate of income tax to 26 per cent. would yield about £1·95 billion, at 1992-93 levels of income. Separate information for England, Scotland, and Wales is not available.

Board of Inland Revenue

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer further to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report,* column 487, when he expects to make his decision on proposals relating to the review of management and trading and the review of the organisation and structure of the Board of Inland Revenue; and what consultation he has undertaken.

Mr. Maude: I have nothing to add to my answer of 28 January at column *487*.

Excise Duties

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the implementation of EC single market legislation associated with excise duties.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Commissioners of Customs and Excise have issued draft Finance Bill clauses relating to holding and movement of goods subject to excise duties to relevant trade representative bodies for consultation. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the terms of reference of the study commissioned from University college, Cardiff, concerning the efficiency of the Customs and Excise Agency in its service at airports and seaports; when he expects it to be completed; when it was initiated; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* The Economic and Social Research Council sponsored Mr. E. Maguire, Professor R. Morgan and Mr. C. Kemp to research complaints to and against central Government Departments. The immigration service and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise were selected to be researched, in a project which started on 1 October 1989. Research was completed in September 1991. A draft report has been produced, and is with the Government Departments to identify factual inaccuracies before publication.

The terms of reference of the research were to construct a comprehensive picture of complaints received in all areas of the Department, analyse the grievance mechanisms, examine internal attitudes towards complaints, and examine any managerial or policy making use made of complaints patterns or outcomes. The research therefore extended far wider than the efficiency of the service at airports and seaports, although this area was covered in two small exercises seeking travellers' and complainants' views through questionnaires.

The survey of travellers concluded that most had no contact with officers of Customs and Excise, and of those who did have contact, most rated the officers positively. The sample of complainants found that few were happy with the responses that they had received from the Department, but nearly half felt that they had achieved something and more than half were impressed by some aspects of the response—especially its speed and the quality of the written reply.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Nursery Education

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many places in nursery schools and classes were provided by local education authorities in 1990-91 and 1991-92 in England and Wales; how many of these places were *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time; and what was the total number of full-time equivalent places provided.

Mr. Eggar: Information on the number of pupils in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools in each local education authority in England in January 1991, the latest date for which information is available, is given in the table. The table also contains information about the number of pupils under five in infant classes in maintained primary schools. Information on schools in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales.

All pupils under the age of 5 in maintained nursery and primary schools as at January 1991

	Nursery schools		*Nursery classes in primary schools*		*Other pupils under 5 in infant classes in primary schools*		*All pupils in nursery and primary schools*	
	Number of pupils		*Number of pupils*					
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total pupils*	*Full-time equivalent of pupils*
City	0	0	13	7	11	0	31	27·5
Camden	105	44	432	454	525	0	1,560	1,311·0
Greenwich	352	323	237	2,121	961	30	4,024	2,787·0
Hackney	61	111	760	1,241	719	8	2,900	2,220·0
Hammersmith and Fulham	240	333	397	483	467	12	1,932	1,518·0
Islington	143	131	848	697	642	12	2,473	2,053·0
Kensington and Chelsea	165	88	389	164	307	5	1,118	989·5
Lambeth	193	250	550	1,329	919	53	3,294	2,478·0
Lewisham	100	130	363	1,825	865	80	3,363	2,345·5
Southwark	182	288	622	1,519	911	19	3,541	2,628·0
Tower Hamlets	441	252	990	842	805	2	3,332	2,784·0
Wandsworth	112	97	612	1,460	839	21	3,141	2,352·0
Westminster	78	84	421	377	410	13	1,383	1,146·0
Barking	0	0	37	1,353	1,269	0	2,659	1,982·5
Barnet	18	487	43	1,827	1,972	96	4,443	3,238·0
Bexley	20	160	0	791	870	0	1,841	1,365·5
Brent	178	70	333	1,778	1,919	0	4,278	3,354·0
Bromley	0	0	1	142	1,039	7	1,189	1,114·5
Croydon	47	386	0	446	2,494	19	3,392	2,966·5
Ealing	20	564	29	2,579	2,199	3	5,394	3,821·0
Enfield	0	0	0	1,437	2,003	22	3,462	2,732·5
Haringey	206	36	344	1,777	1,688	3	4,054	3,146·0
Harrow	0	0	0	950	1,487	41	2,478	1,982·5
Havering	0	0	9	228	864	910	2,011	1,442·0
Hillingdon	0	120	0	3,011	52	69	3,252	1,652·0
Hounslow	0	0	1,755	2,385	9	2	4,151	2,957·5
Kingston upon Thames	69	144	10	865	466	465	2,019	1,282·0
Merton	0	0	2	2,314	828	195	3,339	2,084·5
Newham	42	967	52	2,579	0	783	4,423	2,258·5
Redbridge	0	0	39	844	818	17	1,718	1,287·5
Richmond upon Thames	8	52	0	630	32	985	1,707	873·5
Sutton	0	240	0	1,247	46	1	1,534	790·0
Waltham Forest	53	262	101	2,061	817	0	3,294	2,132·5
Total Greater London	2,833	5,619	9,389	41,763	29,253	3,873	92,730	67,102·5
Birmingham	840	1,514	2,047	5,713	9,721	0	19,835	16,221·5
Coventry	50	318	29	1,825	2,766	7	4,995	3,920·0
Dudley	9	300	120	2,371	1,223	25	4,048	2,700·0
Sandwell	143	108	197	3,941	2,709	31	7,129	5,089·0
Solihull	0	0	0	1,673	1,746	18	3,437	2,591·5
Walsall	92	671	36	3,389	2,364	5	6,557	4,524·5
Wolverhampton	0	821	1	3,046	1,056	4	4,928	2,992·5
Knowsley	0	0	8	2,252	1,569	0	3,829	2,703·0
Liverpool	163	424	524	5,181	4,429	0	10,721	7,918·5
St. Helens	5	68	0	1,534	1,542	0	3,149	2,348·0
Sefton	1	316	1	2,080	2,361	0	4,759	3,561·0
Wirral	23	283	2	1,873	2,870	0	5,051	3,973·0
Bolton	59	450	311	2,223	2,406	0	5,449	4,112·5
Bury	68	72	193	1,075	1,505	1	2,914	2,340·0
Manchester	431	133	3,975	2,791	2,148	2	9,480	8,017·0
Oldham	0	0	780	1,491	2,183	0	4,454	3,708·5
Rochdale	52	884	129	980	1,923	0	3,968	3,036·0
Salford	534	362	1,610	725	1,993	0	5,224	4,680·5
Stockport	157	717	0	626	2,316	13	3,829	3,151·0
Tameside	0	341	31	2,084	1,981	4	4,441	3,226·5
Trafford	0	0	0	1,509	1,633	0	3,142	2,387·5
Wigan	28	157	12	1,851	2,702	119	4,869	3,805·5
Barnsley	0	179	6	2,746	998	3	3,932	2,468·0
Doncaster	0	0	64	3,306	2,787	0	6,157	4,504·0
Rotherham	0	387	252	2,276	1,100	0	4,015	2,683·5
Sheffield	135	656	288	4,512	2,046	388	8,025	5,247·0
Bradford	200	307	193	5,055	2,532	443	8,730	5,827·5

	Nursery schools		*Nursery classes in primary schools*		*Other pupils under 5 in infant classes in primary schools*		*All pupils in nursery and primary schools*	
	Number of pupils		*Number of pupils*					
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total pupils*	*Full-time equivalent of pupils*
Calderdale	0	0	317	1,366	1,650	0	3,333	2,650·0
Kirklees	3	539	2	3,668	2,088	0	6,300	4,196·5
Leeds	14	272	78	7,116	3,104	582	11,166	7,181·0
Wakefield	0	459	101	3,570	1,695	116	5,941	3,868·5
Gateshead	8	57	17	1,539	1,606	0	3,227	2,429·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	578	142	717	1,524	2,244	2	5,207	4,373·0
North Tyneside	65	231	28	2,389	1,565	7	4,285	2,971·5
South Tyneside	19	753	10	1,453	1,520	0	3,755	2,652·0
Sunderland	58	945	12	2,149	2,681	0	5,845	4,298·0
Total Metropolitan districts	3,735	12,866	12,091	92,902	82,762	1,770	206,126	152,357·0
Avon	862	684	369	2,458	7,343	5	11,721	10,147·5
Bedfordshire	255	1,108	344	3,352	978	805	6,842	4,209·5
Berkshire	129	2,019	86	3,396	329	43	6,002	3,273·0
Buckinghamshire	1	509	0	1,724	907	1,924	5,065	2,986·5
Cambridgeshire	90	565	39	1,276	5,377	118	7,465	6,485·5
Cheshire	30	801	40	4,541	8,113	12	13,537	10,860·0
Cleveland	0	146	42	8,655	5,397	163	14,403	9,921·0
Cornwall	25	87	1	1,435	1,759	1,510	4,817	3,301·0
Cumbria	1	869	0	2,020	3,728	25	6,643	5,186·0
Derbyshire	147	1,337	599	6,604	3,778	1,482	13,947	9,235·5
Devon	42	254	118	2,245	3,556	275	6,490	5,103·0
Dorset	0	0	0	781	1,023	3,448	5,252	3,137·5
Durham	216	2,290	42	3,487	4,525	28	10,588	7,685·5
East Sussex	3	294	4	1,058	2,211	2,261	5,831	4,024·5
Essex	19	236	114	2,040	6,064	84	8,557	7,377·0
Gloucestershire	0	0	15	0	4,050	32	4,097	4,081·0
Hampshire	0	339	0	1,610	5,640	577	8,166	6,903·0
Hereford and Worcester	0	0	117	1,172	2,178	32	3,499	2,897·0
Hertfordshire	88	1,598	43	6,422	3,957	417	12,525	8,306·5
Humberside	202	899	594	6,540	4,853	142	13,230	9,439·5
Isle of Wight	0	0	5	175	912	1	1,093	1,005·0
Kent	0	84	27	1,773	7,247	3,415	12,546	9,910·0
Lancashire	103	3,297	3	3,534	12,074	6	19,017	15,598·5
Leicestershire	0	50	1,583	3,810	3,266	647	9,356	7,102·5
Lincolnshire	88	211	64	828	4,104	25	5,320	4,788·0
Norfolk	2	399	0	460	3,056	1,769	5,686	4,372·0
North Yorkhire	33	334	126	2,905	4,100	357	7,855	6,057·0
Northamptonshire	15	584	62	2,181	5,060	36	7,938	6,537·5
Northumberland	19	115	38	2,204	2,399	18	4,793	3,624·5
Nottinghamshire	17	549	217	12,311	1,838	228	15,160	8,616·0
Oxfordshire	67	1,007	69	1,368	421	286	3,218	1,887·5
Shropshire	0	168	0	1,255	1,669	473	3,565	2,617·0
Somerset	0	0	36	51	3,631	52	3,770	3,718·5
Staffordshire	952	1,015	1,434	2,760	7,792	206	14,159	12,168·5
Suffolk	6	90	0	2,700	2,399	38	5,233	3,819·0
Surrey	92	326	5	2,346	3,083	223	6,075	4,627·5
Warwickshire	0	755	2	1,300	3,856	15	5,928	4,893·0
West Sussex	13	505	19	111	1,926	32	2,606	2,282·0
Wiltshire	0	0	0	520	2,059	156	2,735	2,397·0
Total Non-metropolitan counties	3,517	23,524	6,257	103,408	146,658	21,366	304,730	230,581·0
ENGLAND	10,085	42,009	27,737	238,073	258,673	27,009	603,586	450,040·5

Private Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to extend the citizens charter so as to cover any grievance which a parent might have against a private school; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: No.

Primary Schools

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are his estimates for the increases in public spending necessary if all primary schools in England were to have a maximum limit of *(a)* 30 and *(b)* 32 on class sizes.

Mr. Fallon: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 24 January at column 343.

Pupils (Learning by Rote)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance he gives *(a)* to local education authorities and *(b)* to Her Majesty's inspectors regarding the desirability of pupils learning multiplication tables by rote; and what representations he has had on the matter.

Mr. Eggar: The national curriculum sets out what is to be taught in schools, and this includes the requirement for pupils to learn mutiplication tables up to 10 times 10. It is for teachers to decide how to deliver the curriculum, and I have not given any guidance on how pupils should learn their tables, nor received any representations on the subject.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 4 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Hong Kong

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, columns 503-4, how many of the Ministers listed, other than the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and himself, took part in party political activities during their visit in addition to their official duties.

The Prime Minister: This information is not centrally recorded and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Further to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 28 January, at columns 503-4, the list of ministerial visits omitted the visit to Hong Kong of Lord Brabazon, Minister of State for Transport, in February 1991.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Skelmersdale

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the assistance available from his Department and the European Community for trade and industry projects in Skelmersdale new town.

Mr. Leigh: Skelmersdale is within the development areas, so firms there are able to benefit from the complete range of assistance available under the DTI's enterprise initiative. The individual measures of support are described in existing departmental publications on the initiative, which are widely available and arrangements have been made for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Skelmersdale new town also forms part of the Mersey basin operational programme area, which qualifies as an objective 2 area under the European Commission structural funds regime. As such, Skelmersdale is eligible to receive European regional development funds and structural funds for appropriate projects related to infrastructure, business support and training.

Maxwell Companies

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response he has made to representations concerning the adequacy of the supervision by the Securities and Investments Board and the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation of the managers of the pension funds of companies of which the late Robert Maxwell was a director.

Mr. Redwood: My Department is in close touch with SIB and IMRO about regulatory lessons on supervision of pension fund managers to be drawn from the Maxwell case.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will state the annual size and increase in the value of exports and imports of manufactured goods in each year since 1985 to *(a)* the European Community, *(b)* the United States, *(c)* Japan and *(d)* all other countries; and also express the year on year changes as an index with 1985 as the base.

Mr. Sainsbury: The available information is contained in the following tables. Manufactured goods are defined as sections 5 to 8 of the standard international trade classification.

Table 1: United Kingdom Trade in Manufactured Goods

Value, £ billion

	EC		*USA*		*Japan*		*Other Countries*	
	Export	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*
1985	22·1	31·8	8·1	8·4	0·8	4·0	21·5	14·1
1986	24·4	35·3	8·2	7·0	0·9	4·9	21·1	15·6
1987	28·6	39·8	8·7	7·8	1·2	5·4	22·4	17·9
1988	32·4	45·9	8·9	9·3	1·5	6·5	23·3	21·9
1989	38·1	52·8	10·2	11·9	2·0	7·0	26·2	24·4
1990	44·1	54·1	10·6	12·6	2·3	6·6	27·2	24·8
1991	48·0	49·6	9·6	12·0	1·9	6·7	26·5	23·9

Note: EC includes the former East Germany throughout.

Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Table 2: United Kingdom Trade in Manufactured Goods
Increase in value over previous year, £ billion

	EC		USA		Japan		Other Countries	
	Export	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*
1985								
1986	2·3	3·6	0·1	−1·3	0·1	0·8	−0·4	1·4
1987	4·2	4·5	0·6	0·8	0·3	0·6	1·3	2·3
1988	3·8	6·1	0·2	1·5	0·3	1·0	0·9	3·9
1989	5·7	6·9	1·3	2·6	0·5	0·5	2·8	2·6
1990	6·0	1·3	0·4	0·8	0·3	−0·4	1·1	0·4
1991	3·9	−4·5	−1·0	−0·6	−0·4	0·0	−0·7	−0·9

Note: EC includes the former East Germany throughout.
Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Table 3: United Kingdom Trade in Manufactured Goods
Value Index, 1985 = 100

	EC		USA		Japan		Other Countries	
	Export	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*
1985	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1986	110	111	101	84	114	120	98	110
1987	130	125	108	93	149	134	104	127
1988	147	145	111	111	181	160	108	155
1989	172	166	127	142	239	173	121	173
1990	200	170	132	151	274	164	126	175
1991	217	156	120	144	232	165	123	169

Note: EC includes the former East Germany throughout.
Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Table 4: United Kingdom Trade in Manufactured Goods
Year on year percentage change

	EC		USA		Japan		Other Countries	
	Export	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*	*Export*	*Import*
1985								
1986	10·3	11·2	1·5	−15·7	13·7	20·5	−2·0	10·2
1987	17·4	12·7	6·8	10·8	31·4	11·3	6·3	15·0
1988	13·4	15·3	2·4	19·0	21·3	19·2	4·1	21·9
1989	17·4	14·9	14·3	27·7	31·8	8·2	12·0	11·7
1990	15·8	2·5	3·8	6·6	14·7	−5·3	4·1	1·5
1991	8·8	−8·2	−9·0	−5·0	−15·4	0·7	−2·6	−3·7

Note: EC includes the former East Germany throughout.
Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Auditors

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will bring forward proposals to prevent auditors from taking appointments as liquidators, administrators or receivers; and if he will consult the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland about the necessary changes to their rules.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans to do so. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland have published ethical guidelines for their members and these preclude any firm, or member of that firm, which has had a "continuing professional relationship" with any company from accepting an appointment as an insolvency practitioner in respect of it. In this way conflicts of interest are avoided, particularly between those who may have acted as auditors to the company and any subsequent liquidator.

Peter Dixon and Peter Cameron-Webb

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in the investigation into the activities of Peter Dixon and Peter Cameron-Webb at Lloyd's.

Mr. Redwood: The City of London police and the Serious Fraud Office announced in December 1988 that warrants had been issued for Peter Dixon and Peter Cameron-Webb in connection with the Lloyd's PCW investigation. Both were, and are understood to have remained, resident in the United States, but due to certain restrictions could not be extradited.

The final report of the Companies Act inspectors who investigated the affairs of Minet Holdings plc and WMD Underwriting Agencies Ltd., which details the activities of Dixon and Cameron-Webb at Lloyd's, was published in August 1990. At that time, the Secretary of State announced his intention to make applications under section 8 of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 in respect of Dixon, Cameron-Webb and John Wallrock. On 31 October 1991, Wallrock was disqualified for five years. The proceedings in respect of Dixon and Cameron-Webb are due to be heard on 6 February.

Insolvency Service Staff

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will supply a figure for the cost of issuing name badges to the staff of the insolvency service.

Mr. Redwood: The cost was £3,657·60.

Hinckley, Leicestershire

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether Hinckley in Leicestershire is placed under objective 2 of the European regional development fund.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 31 January 1992]*: No. The European Commission refused the Government's proposal that it should be.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Clocking In

Mr. Cox: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if he will list the grades of staff employed who are required to clock in and clock out at the start and finish of their day's work.

Mr. Beith: All grades of Refreshment Department industrial staff are required to register their attendance by clock.

Staff Insurance

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission whether *(a)* police and security staff, *(b)* catering and cleaning staff, *(c)* Library staff, *(d) Official Report* staff, *(e)* Committee Office staff, *(f)* Fees Office staff and *(g)* hon. Members' secretaries and research assistants are covered by an insurance scheme in the event of (i) industrial injury or (ii) an act of terrorism in the Palace of Westminster and its outbuildings.

Mr. Beith *[holding answer 22 January 1992]*: All staff employed by the House of Commons Commission are covered against injury or death sustained in the course of their duties by the provisions of the House of Commons staff pension scheme.

Insurance cover has been arranged for Members in respect of employers' liability to provide for any of their staff who suffer injury or death at work due to the Member's negligence. The House of Commons Commission is considering the question of further provision to cover Members' staff against acts of terrorism.

The terms and conditions of service of police officers and security staff employed in the parliamentary estate are the responsibility of the Home Office.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Cable Channel

Sir David Steel: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take steps *(a)* to arrange for the cable parliamentary channel to be available on the monitors in No. 1 Parliament street and *(b)* to remove from them the interruption caused by noises from the House of Lords annunciator.

Mr. MacGregor: As I said in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 27 January (*Official Report*, columns 701-2), the question of supplying Members' offices with the parliamentary cable channel (or the clean television feed direct from the Chamber) is to be discussed shortly by the Broadcasting Committee. If it approves the proposal in principle, the Committee will then wish to consider whether such facilities should be made available immediately to those parts of the parliamentary estate (such as No. 1 Parliament street) which are already suitably cabled, or whether it would be preferable to introduce the service for all Members, as far as practicable, simultaneously.

The provision on the monitors of information from the House of Lords annunciator service has been considered to be generally useful. Unfortunately, it would not be possible to suppress the information from individual monitors.

Braille Transcription Service

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make it his policy to provide a Braille transcription service to enable hon. Members to correspond with their blind constituents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall ask the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) as Chairman of the Administration Committee, to invite the Finance and Administration Department to examine the feasibility and possible cost of providing such a service for Members.

Members' Pensions

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Lord President of the Council what provision has been made in recent years in the estimates of pensions for the staff of hon. Members; how this provision compares with the amount notionally available; what the amount actually disbursed has been; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The maximum sum available to an hon. Member to make pension contributions in respect of a person employed by him and paid out of the office costs allowance is limited in any one year to 10 per cent. of the limit of the office costs allowance for that year.

Although the total sum notionally available is therefore equal to 10 per cent. of the provision for the office costs allowance included in the Estimates for the House of Commons, the sum actually available is further restricted by the application of a pension provision limitation of 10 per cent. of the gross salary paid to an individual secretary/research assistant. Given that most Members are unlikely to devote the whole of their office costs allowance to salaries, because of the need to meet other expenditure, the notionally available figures shown below are not very relevant.

With that proviso, the total sums notionally available, together with the total sums actually expended in each of the last three completed years, are:

	Notionally available £	*Actual expenditure* £
1988-89	1,468,000	776,795
1989-90	1,560,000	836,961
1990-91	1,775,000	948,219

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Croatia

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of tanks obtained from European nations by the Republic of Croatia for the defence of its borders, and their source.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no evidence that any European nation is in breach of the United Nations embargo.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the reports produced in Yugoslavia by the international team of experts have now been submitted to the Hague conference on Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I presume that my hon. Friend is referring to the team of experts alluded to in the report published in *The Guardian* on 17 January 1992. We have no report of the identity of this team or its activities.

EMPLOYMENT

Offshore Oil

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will introduce a licensing fee for oil companies operating in the North sea to cover the cost of providing health and safety inspectors in connection with their operations.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Commission has not adopted a general policy onshore of charging to cover the costs of health and safety inspection, in view of the difficulties of devising an equitable and workable system. Similar considerations apply offshore, but charges will continue to be made to cover the costs of regular examinations of life-saving appliances and fire-fighting equipment on installations.

Holidays

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to ensure that all employees have a statutory right to two weeks minimum paid holiday.

Mr. Forth: We have no such plans.

Idnal Fisher Ltd.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Health and Safety Executive is to initiate a prosecution against Idnal Fisher Ltd., Bradford following the death of Jashir Singh on 9 April.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive is considering what, if any, action is appropriate following the investigation into the fatal accident to Jashir Singh on 9 April 1991 at Idnal Fisher Ltd., Bradford. I have asked the HSE's area director for West and North Yorkshire to write to the hon. Member when a decision has been made.

Crane Accident, St. Mary's

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when investigating the accident to a crane on 13 July 1991 at St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly, following the discovery that the safe load indicator was defective due to the damaged crane, what other sources of information were sought to verify its condition when the crane was operational.

Mr. Forth: As part of the Health and Safety Executive's investigation to establish the condition of the safe load indicator on the crane immediately before the accident on 13 July 1991, the HSE inspector interviewed witnesses to the accident to determine whether the warning bell had been ringing when the crane began to overturn; obtained from the company a copy of the crane manufacturer's data sheet which describes the crane's main dimensions and lifting capacities; observed the engraved plastic cards in the crane cab which also describe the dimensions and capacities of the crane; examined the cam fitted in the automatic safe load indicator; obtained a copy of the last statutory examination of the machine by a competent person.

Allied Colloids Ltd.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the investigation into the accident to James Armstrong at Allied Colloids Ltd., Low Moor, on 25 April 1988 was concluded; what recommendations for improving the loading arrangements were made; if these were implemented; and if he will make a statement on the safety of current arrangements.

Mr. Forth: No accident to James Armstrong at Allied Colloids Ltd, Low Moor on 25 April 1988 has been reported to the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. R. K. Palmer (Accident)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will obtain from the Health and Safety Executive information regarding the accident to R. K. Palmer on 5 August 1991; and whether a prosecution is to be undertaken against either Nationwide Access Platforms Ltd., or A & P Appledore (Falmouth) Ltd.

Mr. Forth: Mr. R. K. Palmer, and employee of A & P Appledore (Falmouth) Ltd., suffered injuries to his legs and head while working on a mobile elevated work platform.

The Health and Safety Executive has initiated prosecution action against Nationwide Access Platforms Ltd. for an alleged breach of section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *215*, what guidance is given to Health and Safety inspectors about the reliance to be placed on statements taken by an employer from employees in investigating accidents where employees are injured.

Mr. Forth: Health and Safety Executive inspectors carrying out investigations into accidents in which employees are injured, conduct their own independent inquiries. Inspectors are advised to collect all the relevant information during their investigations and this could include statements taken by an employer from employees which may be helpful. However, inspectors personally interview whoever, in their professional judgment, is able to assist them in establishing the facts and do not rely on statements taken by employers.

A. Marks and Company Ltd.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action is being undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive regarding the fatal accident to Mr. Lewis Drake at A. Marks & Co. Ltd., Low Moor, Bradford, regarding prosecution; and what changes are to be made to operational procedures to avoid any repetition of the accident.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive has completed its investigation into the fatal accident to Mr. Lewis Drake at A. Marks & Co. Ltd., Bradford. It has deferred a decision on what if any further action may be appropriate until after the inquest into Mr. Drake's death has been held. Following advice from the HSE, the company has already carried out a number of modifications to the plant to prevent a repetition of the accident.

Labour Statistics

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been employed in *(a)* agriculture and horticulture, *(b)* coal extraction and solid fuels, *(c)* shipbuilding and repairs and *(d)* iron and steel, in Great Britain in 1991.

Mr. Jackson: The information is given in the table:

Employees in employment industries (SIC 80)	*Great Britain Thousands September 1991*
Agriculture and horticulture (Class 01)	280·8
Coal extraction and solid fuels (Group 111)	79·7
Iron and steel (Group 221)	47·4
Shipbuilding and ship repairing (Group 361)	46·0

Industrial Disputes

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of working days lost because of industrial disputes in the six months to *(a)* December 1978 and *(b)* December 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: There were 380,000 working days lost as a result of industrial disputes in the six months to November 1991, the latest available period. This is a fraction of the 6 million working days lost in the six months to December 1978. There are fewer strikes now than there have been for more than half a century.

Business Statistics

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the total number of *(a)* business start ups and *(b)* business failures in (i) Great Britain and (ii) each of the regions for the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Regional estimates of VAT registrations and deregistrations, for the years 1980 to 1990, were published in the November 1991 issue of the *Employment Gazette*, a copy of which is available in the Library.

These show clearly the sustained expansion of the small firms sector during the 1980s, in all regions of the country.

Training

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what budget is allocated for *(a)* employment training and *(b)* youth training respectively in each region of his training and enterprise and education directorate for the years 1991-92 and 1992-93; and what were the numbers of unemployed people in each of these regions at the latest available date.

Mr. Jackson: The budget allocations for 1991-92 for employment training and youth training in each region of the training enterprise and education directorate—TEED—are given in table *(a)*. The figures for 1992-93 are still subject to negotiation and therefore not available.

The number of unemployed people in each of the TEED regions as at December 1991 are given in table *(b)*.

Table (a)

£ million

England and Wales	*YT*	*ET*
South East	89·46	32·22
London	49·18	52·09
South West	65·28	25·18
West Midlands	84·50	48·71
East Midlands	96·58	39·94
Yorkshire and Humberside	91·40	52·80
North West	123·59	65·17
Northern	67·76	46·67
Wales	50·88	32·32

Note: ET budgets exclude national allowances (ie unemployment benefit + £10).

Table (b)

Unemployed claimants as at December 1991

TEED regions	*Persons*
South East	347,357
London	385,316
South West	190,128
West Midlands	246,987
East Midlands and Eastern	245,786
Yorkshire and Humberside	222,975
North West	325,792
Northern	134,440
Wales	122,910
Scotland	228,766
Great Britain	2,450,457

Sunday Trading

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will bring forward regulations to prohibit contracts of employment which require shop workers to work on Sunday; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: We have no plans to do so.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security Forces (Compensation for Injuries)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list for each year since 1 January 1968 the sums paid in compensation for death and injury inflicted by members of the security forces where the victims were engaged in illegal or terrorist type activity at the time they suffered the injury or were killed; how many persons were paid compensation in each year; in how many of these cases the compensation was paid in out-of-court settlements before a court hearing; and in how many cases an award was granted by the court;

(2) if he will publish a table to show for each year since 1 January 1968 the number of applications for compensation for *(a)* injury, *(b)* death, inflicted by the security forces, *(c)* injury and *(d)* death resulting from activity by persons other than the security forces, in Northern Ireland for which compensation was refused because the injured party or parties had been involved in terrorist type activity.

Dr. Mawhinney: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Nursery Places

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many places in nursery schools and classes were provided by education and library boards in 1990-91 and 1991-92 in Northern Ireland; how many of these places were *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time; and what was the total number of full-time equivalent places provided.

Dr. Mawhinney: The number of full-time equivalent places provided in controlled nursery schools and classes under the management of education and library boards in each of the years 1990-91 and 1991-92 was:

Nursery schools	*Nursery classes*
2,925	1,700

The number of pupils attending on a full-time or part-time basis is a matter for determination by the education and library boards and boards of governors. The 1991-92 statistics are not yet available, but in 1990-91 the number of pupils enrolled was as follows:

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
Controlled nursery schools	1,860	1,947	3,807
Controlled nursery classes	1,234	796	2,030

Harland and Wolff (Pension Surpluses)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the date prior to privatisation when the pensioners' trustees meeting agreed to pension surpluses being used to subsidise the building of ships by the new owners of Harland and Wolff; if he will publish the information on which this decision was based; whether a similar scheme has been considered with the privatisation of NIE; and what rights have previous members of the scheme who object to the course of action taken.

Mr. Needham: Pension fund moneys have never been used by the new owners of Harland and Wolff to subsidise the building of ships. The pension fund scheme remains unaffected by the privatisation arrangements and members continue to have the right to take up any relevant issues with the trustees. In relation to the Northern Ireland Electricity superannuation scheme, its committee of management and trustees have been given an assurance by the Government that pension scheme surplus will not be prejudiced by the privatisation process.

WALES

Employment Action

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the latest figures for *(a)* the number of employment action places provided and *(b)* the number of places filled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Contracts for employment action are not expressed in terms of places. The numbers of people in Wales receiving employment action allowances on 9 January, the latest date for which figures are available, was 600.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give his latest estimate of the drop-out rate for employment action in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: It is too early in the programme to do so.

Public Libraries

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which county or borough libraries he visited in 1989, 1990 and 1991; and if he will make a statement on his policies covering public libraries in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend's policies in relation to public libraries conform to his statutory responsibilities as defined in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. In pursuance of these duties, my officials have visited a number of public libraries in the last three years, but my right hon. Friend has not had occasion to do so.

Physically Handicapped People

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit the Deeside physically handicapped club at the Melrose centre, Shotton.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his policies concerning the physically handicapped and their social and physical needs.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Advice and guidance on services for people with physical and/or sensory disabilities was issued on 8 May 1990 to all local and health authorities in Wales, and on 7 November 1991 those authorities were sent further advice in the Welsh Office "Protocol for Investment in Health Gain: Physical Disability and Discomfort: Physical and Sensory Disability". Copies of both documents are in the Library of the House. Local and health authorities are required to take them carefully into account in the preparation of their social care plans and local strategies for health.

Bus Demonstration Projects

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to make funds available for bus demonstration projects in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A total of £0·5 million in supplementary credit approvals has now been made available to local authorities for 1992-93 to promote innovate bus priority schemes. This is additional to the capital provision for local authorities announced by my right hon. Friend on 11 December. Officials will be writing shortly to invite applications.

Bus priority schemes will also be considered during the next capital spend.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the sum of the precepts of the spending authorities on the collecting authorities in Wales in 1992-93, on the assumption that local authorities spend at their standard spending assessment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Precepts on collection funds in Wales assuming expenditure at standard spending assessment level and no drawings from reserves should be £257 million.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much he estimates will be raised from standard community charges on empty properties and second homes in Wales in 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The standard charge, with limited exceptions, is payable for properties which are no one's sole or main residence or have been unoccupied for more than six months.

The level of standard charge is determined by reference to the level of personal charge an authority sets for its area. In the main, these have not yet been set for 1992-93.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sum was ear-marked for allocation by his Department as the Welsh share of the central funding initiative for combating alcohol misuse; what sum has has *(a)* earmarked for each county in Wales, *(b)* granted to each county in Wales in respect of 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 and *(c)* how much was spent for each county in 1990-91; and how much has been spent so far in 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The initiative to combat alcohol misuse in Wales is independent of other campaigns and there is therefore no Welsh share. As part of this initiative a recurring amount of £150,000 was made available in 1990-91 and a further £150,000 was added in 1991-92, also recurring. Funds are not "earmarked" for each county; bids are considered on their merits. In 1990-91, the individual projects funded were as follows:

Title	*Cost (£)*
1. Drinkwise material	22,647·00
2. "Psst". Education video and supporting teachers packs for secondary schools	13,974·00
3. Rhoserchan Project—Rehabilitation centre	6,790·00
4. West Glamorgan Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse	568·00
5. Youthlink Wales	1,358·00
6. South Glamorgan Council on Alcoholism	15,156·00
7. Clwyd and Gwynedd Council on Alcohol	19,965·00
8. Ty Palmyra Rehabilitaion Centre, Gwent	1,623·00
9. Dyfed Alcohol Advisory Service	3,480·00
10. Alcohol Concern Wales	2,379·00
11. Rhythm and Booze Radio 1 Campaign Broadcast Support Service	3.500·00
Total cost	91,440·00

It is not possible to identify expenditure by county for 1991-92, as plans have yet to be finalised and grants claimed. In view of the delay, funds will be allocated to additional projects on a non-recurring basis. Forecast outturn is estimated to be around £230,000.

Patients (Referrals)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to fulfil ministerial assurances that contractual arrangements by health authorities in Wales will not interfere in the freedom of general practitioners and clinicians to refer patients to the most appropriate hospital and consultant.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I shall be issuing consolidated guidance on the management and operation of extra-contractual referrals later this month, and this will again emphasise the principle that GP's and other clinicians should be free, when necessary, to refer in the best interests of their patients.

Health authorities when setting contracts and establishing mechanisms for managing extra-contractual referrals are required to have as their objective the pattern of referrals which local clinicians and GPs prefer.

From this year, the annual performance review with the Department will be held jointly with district health authorities and family health service authorities so as to further enhance the partnership between primary and secondary care in the setting of contracts.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about difficulties and delays experienced when patients are referred by clinicians in Wales for treatment and its transpires that this must be done by means of extra-contractual referral.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department has recorded only one representation about delays or difficulties arising from extra-contractual referrals. Upon investigation, I was satisfied that the problems raised by the correspondent were not related to the extra-contractual referral process.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that all patients in Wales waiting for treatment will be counted in the appropriate Welsh Office statistics; and if he will instruct health authorities that any patients who are described as waiting to go on a waiting list or awaiting extra-contractual referral must be included in that authority's reports and any other published figures.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The monthly returns produced by district health authorities in respect of the treatments they secure for their residents, include statistics for all patients waiting for treatment, whether out-patient, in-patient or day case attendance, across all specialties. Health authorities are required to include extra-contractual referrals in the figures given. They do not operate a system involving people having to wait on one list before being eligible for entry on to another.

Health Service Resources

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has now reached decisions about the allocation of resources for hospital and community health and related services in Wales for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I announced on 28 November at columns 1081-1082 my decision on the allocation of resources for health and personal social services in Wales for 1992-93. Within the £1,877 million resources available, I propose to allocate on a provisional basis £1,420 million for the hospital and community health service and for the cash-limited element of the family health service in Wales. This sum, which is subject to parliamentary approval of the supply estimates, includes the full costs arising from the introduction of charging in respect of many of the services provided in England and Welsh patients. This represents a cash increase of £116·6 million, or 9 per cent. over 1991-92 estimated outturn provision. Of this sum, £54·5 million is to be made available for family health service authorities for their administration expenditure in 1992-93 and for the cash-limited element of the practice expenses of general medical practitioners and GP fundholders. The allocations to family health service authorities will be announced in the course of the next few weeks.

Excluding the cost of the artificial limb and appliance service, which is administered through a service level agreement between my Department and the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, and other centrally financed services, £1,357·1 million will be provided for hospital and community health services—£1,228·7 million for current purposes and £128·4 million for capital spending.

For current spending, this represents a cash increase of £102·3 million or 9·1 per cent. over estimated outturn for the current year. This sum, together with the additional £13 million which it is anticipated authorities should, as a minimum, realise from further cash-releasing cost improvement savings and income generation schemes provide an effective increase in resources over 1991-92 of 10·2 per cent. £13·5 million of this sum will be allocated to fund the continuing and full-year cost of developments which are being funded centrally in 1991-92. £10·1 million will be allocated to other centrally funded developments which will be announced in due course.

The £78·7 million balance of the provision available will be made available for the discretionary use of district health authorities. This provides for a 7·0 per cent. increase in DHA's discretionary revenue provision in cash terms or 2·5 per cent. in real terms, taking account of the latest forecast of general inflation in 1992-93. In addition authorities will be expected to generate a further £13 million—that is, 1·1 per cent.—from new cash-releasing cost improvements and income generation schemes through their contracts with service providers.

Thus, in total, DHAs should benefit from a 3·6 per cent. real terms improvement in their purchasing power, exclusive of any reductions in unit costs that arise from productivity gains as throughput increases. As a consequence, authorities should be able to make substantial improvements in the services offered to patients in accordance with the objectives of the patients charter.

This increase in DHA revenue provision in 1992-93 is considerably in excess of the 0·5 per cent. per annum growth assumption which was used to calculate the figures given in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 21 March 1991 at columns 1081-82 regarding progress toward capitation shares. As a consequence, I am able to ensure that all DHAs in Wales will receive a minimum revenue cash increase of 6·5 per cent. in 1992-93, and that those which would otherwise be more than below their capitation formula targets will also receive the balance of growth funding in proportion to their respective distances from target.

The resulting discretionary revenue allocations for 1992-93 and the increases over their 1991-92 discretionary revenue provision in cash and percentage terms are shown in the table:

	Allocation	*Cash increase*	
	£ million	*£ million*	*per cent.*
Clwyd	160·4	11·4	7·9
East Dyfed	97·9	6·9	7·6
Gwent	170·1	10·3	6·5
Gwynedd	96·6	7·2	8·2
Mid Glamorgan	217·4	13·1	6·5
Pembrokeshire	43·4	3·2	8·0
Powys	55·5	3·3	6·5
South Glamorgan	191·6	9·4	6·5
West Glamorgan	142·5	8·6	6·5

When authorities' estimated shares of the proceeds of capital charges are added to these calculations, each DHA's percentage share of gross discretionary revenue provision in 1992-93 by comparison with its capitation formula target, updated for estimated population changes is as follows:

	Gross Discretionary Revenue Provision Percentage	*Capitation Formula Target Shares Percentage*
Clwyd	13·8	14·3
East Dyfed	8·5	8·8
Gwent	15·7	15·2
Gwynedd	8·3	8·7
Mid Glamorgan	19·1	19·2
Pembrokeshire	3·8	3·9
Powys	4·7	4·1
South Glamorgan	13·5	13·0
West Glamorgan	12·6	12·8

Accordingly, the revenue planning assumptions for individual authorities in subsequent years which I gave in my answer of 21 March 1991 have been revised as in table 3:

Percentage growth on previous year for 1992-93 to 2001-02 assuming 0·5 per cent. growth

	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02
Clwyd	1·27	1·10	1·10	1·10	1·09	1·09	0·45	0·45	0·45
East Dyfed	1·10	1·03	1·02	1·02	1·02	1·02	0·45	0·45	0·45
Gwent	0·00	−0·10	−0·10	−0·10	−0·10	−0·10	0·45	0·45	0·45
Gwynedd	1·50	1·20	1·20	1·19	1·19	1·18	0·45	0·45	0·45
Mid Glamorgan	0·00	0·62	0·62	0·62	0·62	0·62	0·45	0·45	0·45
Pembroke	1·37	1·15	1·14	1·14	1·14	1·13	0·45	0·45	0·45
Powys	0·00	−2·15	−2·22	−2·29	−2·37	−2·45	0·45	0·45	0·45
South Glamorgan	0·00	−0·27	−0·27	−0·28	−0·28	−0·29	0·45	0·45	0·45
West Glamorgan	0·00	0·76	0·76	0·76	0·76	0·76	0·45	0·45	0·45

These growth planning assumptions assume that capital charges remain the same over the planning period. Although growth of 0·5 per cent. has been assumed on the recurring revenue total, this is exclusive of capital charges, and this becomes 0·45 per cent. when expressed as a percentage of the recurring revenue and the recycled capital charges combined.

I must stress that the figures in table 3 are for planning purposes only. They will be revised and rolled forward each year to take account of actual allocations. The redistribution of resources indicated by these figures will affect the purchasing positions of health authorities, but the provision of services will depend on where purchasers choose to place their contracts. The future of individual hospitals will therefore not always depend on the relative funding position of authorities in which they are located.

Under the new capital allocation arrangements which become effective on 1 April 1992, £97 million will be earmarked for the purposes of the all-Wales major capital programme. Further details of this programme will be announced in due course. £35 million will be made available for the discretionary capital requirements of DHAs and the new Pembrokeshire health trust, as well as the minor capital needs of various other service providers which are not managed by DHAs. This provision includes a sum of £3·4 million which is available as a result of authorities repaying brokerage loans from earlier years.

£1·7 million of this £35 million will be allocated in the form of additional revenue provision to the prospective pruchasers of the Pembrokeshire trust's services. It will thus form part of the trust's income for 1992-93 which can then be recapitalised to meet its capital requirements. The trust's capital expenditure will, however, also be subject to the external financing limit which I shall be issuing to the trust when its financial plan for next year has been updated to take account of the allocations to its prospective purchasers that are covered in this announcement.

A further £2 million will be held in reserve to meet the minor capital requirements of various other service providers such as the dental hospital, Breast Test Wales and the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

The £31·3 million balance of capital provision will be allocated between the DHAs on behalf of their directly managed units; and in order to ensure the fair distribution of this sum between service providers, it will be allocated between authorities pro rata to the anticipated revenue income which their units will attract next year. In this way, minor capital provision, like revenue will "follow the patient".

The resulting capital allocations are set out in the following table. No allocation is shown for Pembrokeshire health authority because, when the Pembrokeshire trust comes into operation on 1 April, it will no longer be responsible for the capital needs of a directly managed unit. The trust's capital requirements will be met as previously noted.

	Capital allocation (£ million)
Clwyd	4·0
East Dyfed	3·3
Gwent	5·1
Gwynedd	2·1
Mid Glamorgan	5·9
Powys	1·1
South Glamorgan	5·5
West Glamorgan	4·3

In addition, property sales in 1992-93 are expected to generate a further £5·2 million and it is anticipated that authorities will benefit from £4·2 million of these receipts. In total, I expect authorities to achieve additional savings and to generate additional income amounting to at least 1·1 per cent. of their recurrent revenue allocations.

These allocations together represent another major increase in the provision for hospital, community and family health service. They once again underline the Government's commitment to the NHS and they underpin the assurances given about service availability and quality in the patients charter. They accord with the new resource allocation arrangements that flow from the NHS and Community Care Act and, in particular, make real progress toward weighted capitation funding. Indeed, they provide a secure basis on which to take forward the "Agenda for Action" which my Department recently published, and to which the NHS in Wales is fully committed. I am therefore sure they will be widely welcomed.

Council Home Sales

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what capital receipts have accrued since 1980 to each local authority in Wales from the sale of council houses; what proportion of these receipts in respect of Monmouth borough council have been invested in social housing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 29 January 1992]:* In-year capital receipts are shown in the table. Information on the proportion of these used to fund specific housing programmes is not held centrally.

In-year capital receipts from the sale of council houses[1]

£000

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*Total 1981-82 to 1990-91*
Alyn and Deeside	691	388	446	847	1,155	943	1,150	2,257	3,724	2,147	13,748
Colwyn	754	705	532	415	544	605	758	1,305	1,407	787	7,812
Delyn	773	651	1,068	3,889	453	681	1,089	1,070	1,986	1,471	13,131
Glyndwr	791	1,212	627	[illegible]	1,498	727	709	1,875	2,017	867	10,761
Rhuddlan	412	335	373	391	627	467	844	1,541	1,457	881	7,328
Wrexham Maelor	2,009	1,388	719	867	1,320	1,997	3,095	4,433	10,329	4,322	30,479
Carmarthen	1,628	1,348	963	944	632	741	845	1,549	1,793	1,697	12,140
Ceredigion	1,628	1,888	1,193	819	580	1,020	869	2,291	3,133	1,877	15,298
Dinefwr	712	596	336	329	484	768	730	1,198	1,279	1,260	7,692
Llanelli	1,645	1,874	2,139	1,352	1,141	1,695	1,984	3,258	3,383	2,236	20,707
Preseli Pembroke	2,623	1,539	1,666	1,108	1,053	1,123	1,245	3,137	4,217	2,367	20,078
South Pembrokeshire	112	1,121	1,511	1,009	456	446	728	1,745	1,976	1,151	10,255
Blaenau Gwent	954	1,586	1,005	723	3,406	1,386	1,511	2,932	4,750	2,162	20,415
Islwyn	1,653	8,274	2,775	1,767	1,541	2,193	2,550	4,118	4,229	1,531	30,631
Monmouth	285	260	3,036	2,563	1,974	2,088	2,763	4,097	4,689	2,144	23,899
Newport	1,878	2,623	2,884	3,135	7,534	3,486	3,490	6,972	8,513	2,745	43,260
Torfaen	2,674	3,722	3,009	2,552	1,465	4,811	3,532	7,170	9,380	4,875	43,190
Aberconwy	1,095	1,270	804	692	734	858	1,071	2,566	3,201	1,188	13,479
Arfon	1,054	2,200	723	851	548	777	738	2,085	2,570	1,242	12,788
Dwyfor	1	512	244	156	220	143	129	352	521	591	2,869
Meirionnydd	0	1,013	664	341	394	407	590	1,054	1,296	497	6,256
Ynys Mon	1,085	875	486	517	1,144	920	739	2,918	3,868	1,910	14,462
Cynon Valley	0	2,494	1,120	560	526	1,062	1,015	1,302	557	2,078	10,714
Merthyr Tydfil	1,379	1,784	1,032	849	1,257	1,627	1,842	2,663	3,156	1,213	16,802
Ogwr	1,403	3,816	9,104	3,204	3,106	3,674	2,998	5,144	6,220	3,466	42,135
Rhondda	362	191	230	202	275	398	355	557	738	628	3,936
Rhymney Valley	1,880	2,659	2,073	1,719	1,615	2,839	3,175	3,023	4,407	3,541	26,931
Taff Ely	20	992	1,886	1,724	1,802	2,910	3,663	4,707	6,155	3,539	27,398
Brecknock	1,922	328	1,149	1,015	918	1,159	1,324	1,977	1,325	1,086	12,203
Montgomeryshire	10	104	946	648	782	1,207	1,065	1,864	2,230	1,068	9,924
Radnorshire	701	670	689	281	317	296	595	774	881	500	5,704
Cardiff	2,355	1,515	4,015	5,039	6,312	11,529	9,179	14,349	16,819	8,319	79,431
Vale of Glamorgan	1,449	2,762	2,766	2,274	2,084	3,297	2,947	5,755	5,079	2,260	30,673
Port Talbot	890	435	1,950	1,850	2,080	2,517	3,063	4,211	5,182	2,624	24,802
Lliw Valley	734	1,266	502	623	960	1,372	1,343	1,731	2,968	2,475	13,974
Neath	1,636	1,140	714	947	1,410	1,539	1,864	2,482	3,038	1,951	16,721
Swansea	0	1,607	1,831	6,027	1,580	2,260	3,588	8,467	9,624	4,375	39,359
Total Districts	39,198	57,143	57,210	52,667	53,927	65,968	69,175	118,929	148,097	79,071	741,385

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[1] Includes the repayment of principal on local authority mortgages on council house sales.

Local Authority Capital Receipts

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table for each region and each class of local authority in Wales, for housing capital receipts and other capital receipts, showing *(a)* total cash-backed capital receipts available to local authorities at 31 March 1990 and the amount of those receipts that were set aside as provision for credit liabilities, *(b)* the total of capital receipts received by local authorities in 1990-91 and the amount of those receipts set aside as provision for credit liabilities, *(c)* total capital receipts spent by Welsh local authorities in 1990-91, *(d)* the estimated total of capital receipts local authorities received in 1991-92 and the amount of those receipts that are likely to be set aside as provision for credit liabilities and *(e)* the estimated total of capital receipts spent on capital projects in 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 29 January 1992]:* I have placed a copy of the information available in the Library of the House.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will require health authorities in Wales to include all patients awaiting treatment, including those awaiting extra-contractual arrangements, in their returns to the Welsh Office and ensure that such cases are included in the totals of figures published by his Department.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* Welsh Office waiting list returns already require district health authorities in Wales to report information on all patients resident in their area, including those subject to extra-contractual referral.

ENVIRONMENT

MINIS

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the development of MINIS in his Department since its inception; and what proposals he has for its further development.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department is currently engaged on the 13th round of MINIS returns and reviews. Since I introduced the system in 1980, there have been many detailed changes over the years in the way material is collected and presented. In the early rounds, the emphasis was on establishing the full range of functions being undertaken within the Department and the staff and other costs related to each. The next stage of development was to include better defined aims, objectives and targets in order to clarify what was being achieved and to ensure that these achievements fully supported Government policies and priorities. The most recent developments have concentrated on making MINIS more useful as a system for top management and Ministers, which has entailed the development of supporting line management systems at all levels through the Department; and on considering the allocation of administrative resources alongside the setting of objectives and targets, to ensure that resources are in the right place to do the job.

MINIS returns are published after each round and a copy is placed in the Library of the House. Copies of MINIS 13 returns will be made available in the same way in due course.

Radon

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in exploring possibilities of an accreditation scheme for builders engaged in remedial work on radon, pursuant to his Department's response to the sixth report from the Select Committee on the Environment, Session 1990-91, into indoor pollution.

Mr. Baldry: Discussions with the National Radiological Protection Board and representatives of the building industry in the south-west have established that training and experience are essential prerequisites for developing any accreditation scheme. The Building Research Establishment is now arranging a series of training courses for builders and building professionals on radon remedial measures.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authorities on the need for supplementary credit allocations to deal with the possible roll-out of previous swaps deals; and what replies he has made.

Mr. Portillo: Two local authorities have asked my Department for supplementary credit approvals in respect of potential restitution payments on interest rate swaps. They have been told that it would be premature to consider such requests until the amounts involved can be estimated with reasonable certainty. They have also been told that, while requests for SCAs will be carefully considered, we do not have a reserve of resources for this purpose, so any additional allocations to one authority would be at the expense of others, or would require an increase in capital expenditure.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the sum of the precepts of the spending authorities on the collecting authorities in England in 1992-93, on the assumption that local authorities spend at their standard spending assessment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The sum of standard spending assessments for precepting authorities in England for 1992-93, on the basis of the reports laid before the House on 24 January, is £20,444·1 million.

Planning Applications

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to revise the criteria used in determining whether to call in planning applications under section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to reflect the new priority being attached to development plans by section 54a of the 1990 Act, as inserted by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

Mr. Yeo: We have no plans to do so.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to require local planning authorities to determine whether planning applications are in accordance with the development plan before their determination.

Mr. Yeo: Authorities are already required by the Town and Country Planning (Development Plans) (England) Direction 1981 to take a view on whether planning applications depart from the development plan, to advertise any such application which they do not intend to refuse and to notify certain departures to the Secretary of State.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will amend the directions made under section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to require the Secretary of State to be notified of planning applications which depart from the local plan as well as the structure plan and which the local planning authority do not intend to refuse.

Mr. Yeo: We are considering the need for a fresh direction. The basis for notifying applications which depart from development plans to the Secretary of State would be an important consideration in making such a direction.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his answer on 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *351-53*, by what criteria he concluded that there is no case for statutory action in instances where there is evidence of a breach of statutory provisions.

Mr. Portillo: The Secretary of State's conclusion in relation to any case has regard to the circumstances of the case and to the balance of evidence.

Derelict Land

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 22 January, *Official Report*, column 309, what plans he has to continue the national register of vacant and public land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My Department's register is expected to remain in existence as long as my right hon. Friend's power to direct disposal is limited to sites entered on it. However, only sites for which the possibility of a direction is under consideration are being added to the register. For the longer term, as stated in our 1990 consultation paper "Encouraging The Use of Vacant Public Sector Land", it remains our intention to replace the national register with statutory owners' registers for all relevant public bodies.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the oral answer to the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 22 January, *Official Report*, column 309, what other measures, in addition to the requirement for local authorities to maintain and publish registers of their derelict or disused land, are being considered by his Department to address the problem of derelict or disused land in public ownership.

Mr. Yeo: We shall announce any further measures when we are ready.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the oral answer to the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 22 January, *Official Report*, column 309, how many local registers for derelict or disused land in public ownership there will now be in England and Wales.

Mr. Yeo: A total of 430 local authorities in England will be required by the regulations to make available to the public at their principal offices registers of unused and underused land in their ownership. Under the 1989 code of practice, some 200 other local public bodies including health authorities and development corporations as well as Government Departments and other national public bodies are asked to provide similar registers. All bodies have been asked to deposit relevant extracts with district and London borough councils so that they can be made available locally.

Responsibility for land registers in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the oral answer to the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 22 January, *Official Report*, column 309, if he will make it his policy to require a six monthly return from local authorities to his Department, based upon their registers, reporting on the amount of derelict and disused land in public ownership in each local authority area.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities are required to make annual returns to my Department of aggregate information relating to their registers and other public sector owners have been requested to do so under the 1989 code of practice. I have no proposals for altering these arrangements.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the oral answer to the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on 22 January, *Official Report*, column 309, what is the likely cost to local authorities of the scheme of local registration for derelict or disused land in public ownership.

Mr. Yeo: The extra cost to local authorities of maintaining registers of unused and underused land in their ownership is expected to be minimal. They should be recording this information themselves anyway in accordance with the 1989 code of practice and in the ordinary course of efficient property management.

Planning Policy

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will revise planning policy guidance note 1 to withdraw the general presumption in favour of development as it relates to the preparation of development plans.

Mr. Yeo: A draft revision of planning policy guidance note 1 was issued for consultation in October last year. The final version of this guidance will be published shortly in the light of the many responses we have received.

Lowland Peat Bogs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the lowland peat bogs at *(a)* Thorne moors, Yorkshire, *(b)* Hatfield moors, Yorkshire, *(c)* Fenns and Whixall moors, Shropshire and *(d)* Wedholme flow, Cumbria.

Mr. Baldry: The Department gave consent for the then Nature Conservancy Council to purchase the freehold and leasehold interests of Fens Whixall and Bettisfield mosses site of special scientific interest in 1990. Thorne and Hatfield moors, and Wedholme Flow are sites included in the recent announcement by English Nature and Fisons. The sites are being handed over to English Nature at no cost. All the areas where vegetation exists will be managed immediately for nature conservation purposes, and the remainder will be returned to nature conservation over a phased programme agreed between Fisons and English Nature.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if monitoring of ultraviolet radiation is carried out in the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Monday 3 February 1992 at column *11*.

National Parks

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of each of the national parks in England are designated as environmentally sensitive areas; and what is the ESA acreage in each instance.

Mr. Baldry: Substantial parts of the existing Pennine dales, North Peak and the Broads ESAs fall within the Yorkshire Dales national park, the Peak District national park and the Broads Authority respectively. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's recent announcement of further ESA designations included areas in the Lake district, Peak district and Exmoor and Dartmoor national parks. Detailed work on the ESA boundaries to reflect the particular purposes of each new scheme is still underway. The precise proportion of new ESAs in national parks cannot be determined until their boundaries are set, and for existing areas the information can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Revenue Support Grant (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the revenue support grant 1992-93 for Bournemouth in 1991-92; and what account he has taken of the tourism factor.

Mr. Portillo: Bournemouth's revenue support grant for 1992-93 is £34·766 million, an increase of 20 per cent. over the comparable figure for 1991-92. The allowance for overnight visitors in the authority's standard spending assessment is £1·088 million, also an increase of 20 per cent. on this year's figure.

Local Government Commission (Guidance)

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when, and with whom, he proposes to consult on the draft procedural guidance for the Local Government Commission to be issued under clause 15 of the Local Government Bill.

Mr. Portillo: The draft procedural guidance will be published shortly. The main consultation will be with the local authority associations, but we intend also to publicise the availability of the draft, and we shall, of course, be happy to consider comments on it from any interested individual or organisation. The draft will be placed in the Library of the House.

Solent Wetlands

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made with English Nature on designating the Solent wetlands and saltmarshes under the Ramsar convention.

Mr. Baldry: English Nature has identified the Solent marshes, together with Southampton water, as a potential Ramsar site, but they have not formally recommended designation to Government.

Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of state for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority respecting the provisional standard spending assessment and capping criteria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend has had no discussions with the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority on his proposals for the 1992-93 local government finance settlement, nor during the consultation period did he receive any representations from the authority on these matters. My right hon. and noble Friend, the Minister of State for the Home Office, met a delegation from the authority on 23 January 1992 to discuss their review of standards of fire cover.

My right hon. Friend laid the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1992-93 and associated reports before the House on Friday 24 January. The SSA for Merseyside fire and civil defence authority for 1992-93 is £45·859 million, an increase of 7·4 per cent. on 1991-92, and, as a result of changes in underlying data, £12,000 greater than the provisional SSA proposed on 26 November. The authority's SSA per adult (£44) is the highest of the metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities.

My right hon. Friend reaffirmed on 23 January that he remained minded to adopt as capping criteria the provisional criteria announced on 26 November. On the basis of these criteria, the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority could set a budget 7·4 per cent. higher than for 1991-92 without falling to be designated for capping.

Public Records

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals the Lord Chancellor has to maintain collections of public records currently held by county councils in the light of the proposed restructuring of local government; and whether he has sought comments from the Advisory Council on Public Records about this matter.

Mr. Portillo: In recommending any unitary authorities, the proposed Local Government Commission would have to be satisfied about the delivery of archive services. There will be ample opportunities for bodies concerned with archives to offer advice and comment on the commission's recommendations.

Minerals

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of the Town and Country Planning (Development Plan) Regulations 1991/2794 upon the ability of the mineral industry to supply the construction industry with the materials it needs.

Mr. Yeo: The statutory duty for all mineral planning authorities to prepare a minerals local plan will provide the mineral industry with an up-to-date planning framework which will assist with the continuing supply of minerals for the construction industry in an environmentally acceptable manner. The regulations set out the detailed requirements for the preparation of minerals and other development plans.

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what restraints he has placed upon district authorities to prevent them either deferring or overriding county mineral and waste disposal plans; and what mechanism he has provided for reconciling the conflict between county and district authorities on issues of importance to the mineral industry in discharging its role as supplier of aggregates.

Mr. Yeo: District local plans and minerals and waste local plans have to be in general conformity with the relevant structure plan. County planning authorities must be consulted on the preparation of district local plans and have the right to object to any policies or proposals of such plans. The Secretary of State has reserve powers to direct modification or to call in, all or part of a plan should that be necessary. The Town and Country Planning (Development Plan) Regulations 1991 provide that in the event of conflict between the provisions of a minerals or waste local plan on the one hand and a district local plan on the other, the provisions of the more recently adopted or approved plan prevail.

UN Conference on Environment and Development

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the proposals by the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection Committee of the European Parliament on European Communities' participation in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil in June; and what plans he has to work more closely with the European Parliament on environmental matters.

Mr. Baldry: The European Parliament's Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection Committee last year presented an interesting report on the Community's participation in the UN Conference on Environment and Development. This report, sent to the Commission and member states, will be taken into account in the Community's preparations for UNCED. On future relations with the European Parliament, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 30 January at column *641*.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *642*, if he will publish tables based on the same criteria for the 1992-93 standard spending assessments which were laid before the House on 24 January.

Mr. Portillo: A table containing the information requested has been placed in the Library.

Water Treatment

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement concerning his consultations with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority regarding the implementation within the United Kingdom of the 1985 European Community municipal waste water treatment directive.

Mr. Baldry: The European Community's proposed municipal waste water treatment directive was adopted in May 1991 as the urban waste water treatment directive. The department has set up an advisory group to assist in the task of implementing the directive in the United Kingdom. The National Rivers Authority is represented on this group.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to issue guidance on the definition of sensitive waters for the purposes of the implementation in the United Kingdom of the 1985 European Community municipal waste water treatment directive.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 13 January 1992 at column *432*.

Fuel and Power Industry Processes

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the remainder of the process guidance notes for the fuel and power industry processes prescribed under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will be available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I am pleased to report that we have issued the chief inspector's guidance to inspectors for 16 processes in the fuel and power industry. These notes have been drawn up following completion of research reviews; and relevant industries and other bodies have been given the opportunity to put forward their comments. The notes will provide a sound framework within which inspectors can assess applications for the authorisation of new processes and existing processes. They represent a further stage in the introduction of integrated pollution control.

A set of the notes has been placed in the Library of the House.

The preparation of guidance notes for the remaining processes to come under control is well advanced. Further notes will be published in the next few months.

Preston Farm, Stockton on Tees

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions his Department has had with the Teesside development corporation about Preston farm, Stockton on Tees.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement announced today that the defence quality assurance laboratories will not be relocating to Preston farm. This leaves the way open for a series of new developments on the site. The Teesside development corporation will be announcing the first of these today, a £7 million investment by Livera Foods plc. The new factory is expected to create up to 700 new jobs. In addition, it is expected that a further 100 jobs will be created by the company's suppliers, and the construction contracts for the new factory will employ about 80 people.

The development corporation has received a number of other inquiries about the possibility of development on the Preston farm site and hopes to be in the position to make further announcements shortly.

Renovation Grant

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for renovation grant were successful in each year since 1979 *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Yorkshire and Humberside and *(c)* in each local authority in the Yorkshire and Humberside region.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 3 February 1992]*: Information about grants paid to private owners and tenants by local authorities are shown in the publication "Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales". The relevant issue numbers are as follows:

Year	*Issue number(s)*
1979	53-55, 57
1980	57, 58, 61
1981	65
1982	69
1983	73
1984	77
1985	81
1986	85
1987	89
1988	93
1989	97

Copies are in the Library.

Regional and national totals for 1979 and 1980 did not appear in this publication and for England are 65,359 grants paid in 1979 and 74,465 in 1980. The corresponding figures for Yorkshire and Humberside are 7,900 and 9,478 respectively.

The latest figures for 1990 and the first nine months of 1991 are as follows:

	Grants paid to private owners and tenants under (a) Housing Act 1985: 1990	(a) Housing Act 1985: first nine months 1991	(b) Local Government and Housing Act 1989: 1990	(b) Local Government and Housing Act 1989: first nine months 1991
England	89,094	22,703	7,523	43,244
Yorkshire and Humberside	13,901	3,327	583	5,164
Barnsley	644	19	48	364
Doncaster	245	38	1	169
Rotherham	1,538	177	44	645
Sheffield	1,232	300	33	571
Bradford	(3)451	85	(3)—	155
Calderdale	1,042	204	15	280
Kirklees	(3)699	829	(3)—	89
Leeds	(3)750	209	(3)25	503
Wakefield	(2)367	374	(2)5	200
Beverley	(3)35	23	(3)11	82
Boothferry	92	36	53	92
Cleethorpes	191	50	120	188
East Yorkshire	[1]—	28	[1]—	44
Glanford	157	50	23	99
Great Grimsby	324	58	11	234
Holderness	39	9	—	20
Kingston upon Hull	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Scunthorpe	(1)48	[1]—	(1)12	[1]—
Craven	(1)15	[1]—	(1)—	[1]—
Hambleton	42	11	—	7
Harrogate	100	37	21	96
Richmondshire	103	6	5	31
Ryedale	51	(2)15	8	(2)30
Scarborough	128	(2)41	1	(2)18
Selby	145	36	6	66
York	165	16	19	132

[1] No returns received.

Notes: Figures in brackets give number of quarters for which information has been returned if not complete.

Management Agreements

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the number of management agreements under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which have been entered into in *(a)* national nature reserves and *(b)* sites of special scientific interest for each year since 1981 in England; and whether the proposed damage in each case was due to (i) agriculture or (ii) forestry; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the number of management agreements that have been entered into in England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 where payments have been given in the following ranges *(a)* up to £9,999, *(b)* £10,000 to £19,999, *(c)* £20,000 to £29,000, *(d)* £30,000 to £39,999, *(e)* £40,000 to £49,999, *(f)* £50,000 to £59,999 and *(g)* over £60,000;

(3) if he will list *(a)* the ten sites of special scientific interest and *(b)* the ten national nature reserves in England which have the most expensive management agreements giving the name of the site, county in which it is located and the amount which has been or is due to be paid out; if the landowners are required to positively enhance the site as part of the conditions of payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* Few management agreements under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 have been negotiated on national nature reserves, as these are mainly already under sympathetic management and the payments are negligible compared with payments on the agreements on sites of special scientific interest which follow.

Management agreements entered into in England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 on sites of special scientific interest still active total 1,098.

Of these at least 61 arose from proposed damage arising from forestry. A further 1,037 arose from other proposed damage, mainly from agriculture.

The approximate number of agreements entered into or renewed each year and which are still active are as follows.

FY	Number of threat cases	Number due to forestry	Number due to agriculture
1982-83	4	2	2
1983-84	8	3	5
1984-85	16	1	15
1985-86	25	2	23
1986-87	49	5	44
1987-88	57	2	55
1988-89	63	3	60
1989-90	247	15	232
1990-91	257	14	243
1991-92	372	14	358
Total	1,098	61	1,037

Agreements which have expired and those renewed at present are not included.

Payments have been made as follows under the 1,098 management agreements entered into England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This covers currently existing agreements but not those that have expired.

1,098 agreements

£'s

	Number of cases with capital costs	*Number of cases with annual payments*
Less than 9,999	139	946
10,000—19,999	18	20
20,000—29,999	3	8
30,000—39,999	5	8
40,000—49,999	3	2
50,000—59,999	0	0
Greater than 60,000	5	3
Total	173	987

A few have both capital payment (lump sum) and an annual payment.

Details of management agreement payments are confidential between English Nature and the owner or occupier of land, and cannot therefore be provided.

Development Plans

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the organisations and local authorities he has met to discuss the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Development Plans) Regulations 1991; what cost assessment has been made for local authorities and the industry; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* Proposals for the regulations were issued for consultation, together with a draft of planning policy guidance on the new development plans system. About 1,000 copies were sent out, and some 170 responses were received. A list of responses has been placed in the Library. Ministers have not met any local authorities or other organisations to discuss the provisions of the regulations.

We do not expect the new regulations to have any significant extra cost implications for local authorities or other organisations, because they largely rationalise and standardise the arrangements for development plans contained in existing regulations on structure plans, local plans and unitary development plans.

Empty Council Homes

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 20 local authorities which have the highest proportion of empty council homes.

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 20 local authorities which have the largest number of empty council homes.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities reporting the highest percentage of their stock empty in their housing investment programme returns for April 1991 were: Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Burnley, Brent, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Knowsley, Newcastle upon Tyne, Wolverhampton, Easington, Southwark, Newham, Carlisle, Oldham, Sheffield, North Tyneside, Sunderland, Stockton-on-Tees and Rother. Other authorities have higher numbers of empty houses and flats than some in this list but when account is taken of the size of stock their percentage vacancy rates are lower.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Wages Board

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to *(a)* modify or *(b)* abolish the agricultural wages board.

Mr. Curry: None.

Calves

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many calves have been exported from the United Kingdom in each year from 1987 until the present.

Mr. Maclean: The numbers of calves exported from the United Kingdom in each year from 1987 as shown by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise overseas trade statistics are:

	Numbers
1987	373,205
1988	248,788
1989	319,301
1990	345,800
1991[1]	364,637

[1] To end of November.

Veal Crates

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has made to European Community institutions seeking the abolition of the veal crate.

Mr. Maclean: In negotiations leading to the recently adopted directive on the welfare of calves, the United Kingdom pressed most strongly for a European ban on veal crates. However, this was unacceptable to some member states and the directive, adopted by majority vote, does not impose a ban. The United Kingdom was the only member state to vote against the proposal.

Hydatidosis

Mr. Meale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated annual financial loss to the farming and food industries attributable to hydatidosis.

Mr. Maclean: Returns received from a sample of slaughterhouses indicate that approximately 2 per cent. of cattle and 0·2 per cent. of sheep slaughtered in 1990-91 were affected with hydatidosis. However, this information is far from comprehensive and would not allow an estimate to be made of annual financial losses to the food and farming industries attributable to this condition.

ESAs

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will give estimates of the numbers of farmers eligible for the environmentally sensitive area scheme in the Pennine dales, including those announced in his 15 January statement, giving the numbers for each of the 18 eligible dales;

(2) if he will give estimates of the numbers of farmers eligible to benefit from the environmentally sensitive areas

schemes already in existence as well as those eligible in his recent announcements, giving the numbers in each individual area.

Mr. Curry: It is not possible to determine accurately the numbers of farmers eligible to enter the ESA schemes because the boundaries of the schemes do not coincide with parish boundaries in respect of which such data might be obtained from the agricultural census. There are currently 3,105 agreements in the 10 English ESAs, of which 303 are in the Pennine dales ESA. With the enlargement of some of the existing ESAs and the designation of 12 new ones, the number of agreements is expected to increase considerably but it is not possible to make an overall estimate until completion of the review of those environmentally sensitive areas designated in 1988 and determination of the boundaries for the 12 new areas to be introduced this year and in 1993.

Sea Trout

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantities of sea trout were imported in 1991; and what tariffs were applied to non-EC imports.

Mr. Curry: Information on sea trout cannot be distinguished from import figures for all trout. For 1991, figures for trout are available from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise up to the end of August, when 660 tonnes had been imported from EC partners and 108 tonnes from third countries. For the period September to December 1990, the comparable figures were 654 tonnes and 138 tonnes.

The general import duty rate applicable is 12 per cent. except for smoked trout for which the figure is 14 per cent.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department has made or plans to make regarding the possible effects of exposure to ultraviolet light on fisheries in the waters around the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, has responsibility for such matters in relation to the Falkland Islands.

HEALTH

Prescriptions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the total value of prescriptions which have been dispensed in each family health services authority area, and in NHS regions in the last five years *(b)* the average cost of each prescription and *(c)* the cost of prescriptions dispensed per head of population for the same areas and periods.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Dentists

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists are registered and how many are practising in each health authority; and how many new or returning entrants there have been in each of the last three years.

Mr. Dorrell: At the end of 1990 there were 26,320 dentists registered in the United Kingdom with the General Dental Council. The numbers of dentists practising in each regional health authority (RHA) in England at 30 September 1990 are shown in the table:

Regional Health Authority	*General Dental Services (GDS)*	*Hospital Dental Service (HDS)*	*Community Dental Service (CDS)*
Northern	869	149	109
Yorkshire	1,094	120	111
Trent	1,218	167	115
East Anglia	605	70	61
North West Thames	1,512	96	144
North East Thames	1,226	207	111
South East Thames	1,341	285	118
South West Thames	1,240	118	107
Wessex	949	113	124
Oxford	826	66	80
South Western	1,209	161	92
West Midlands	1,395	218	182
Mersey	764	100	87
North Western	1,232	160	156
Total	15,480	2,030	1,597

Note: There may be some duplication in the numbers of dentists practising, as dentists can practise concurrently in the GDS, HDS and CDS.

The numbers of new or returning entrants in each of the last three years are for 1988, 1,409; for 1989, 1,453 and for 1990, 1,581.

Growth Hormone Therapy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure on general practitioner prescribed hormone therapy in each national health service region in 1990; and if he will express that sum as a figure of expenditure per head of children under 16 years of age in each national health service region.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information relating to growth hormone therapy is set out in the table.

Expenditure on Growth Hormone Therapy in 1990—England[1]

Regional Health Authority	*Net ingredient cost (NIC)*[2] *(£000)*	*Cost per child under 16 (pence)*
Northern	96·1	15·6
Yorkshire	854·1	114·3
Trent	432·2	46·2
East Anglia	31·2	7·5
North West Thames	1,837·7	261·0
North East Thames	777·5	101·5
South East Thames	520·0	72·9
South West Thames	162·0	28·7
Wessex	718·1	125·9
Oxford	963·9	177·8
South Western	944·9	151·9
West Midlands	178·0	16·6
Mersey	382·8	77·3
North Western	1,238·8	148·7
England	9,137·3	95·2

[1] The data are estimates based on a sample of 1 in 200 prescriptions dispensed by chemists.

[2] The Net ingredient cost is the basic cost of drugs before discount and does not include the dispensing costs or fees.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the total sums expended on general practitioners prescribed growth hormone therapy in each year since 1985.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is set out in the table.

Total Net Ingredient Cost[1] *on Growth Hormone Therapy—England 1986 to 1990*[2]

Year	*NIC (£000)*
1986	1,190·2
1987	2,229·0
1988	4,622·8
1989	8,875·0
1990	9,137·3

[1] The Net Ingredient Cost is the basic cost of drugs before discount and does not include the dispensing costs or fees.

[2] The data relate to calendar years and are estimates based on a sample of 1 in 200 prescriptions dispensed by chemists. No prescriptions were dispensed in 1985 for growth hormone therapy.

Fresh Fruit (Cariogenicity)

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *54*, if he will give references to the epidemiological evidence that suggests that fresh fruit appears to be low in cariogenicity.

Mr. Dorrell: The Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA) Report, "Dietary Sugars and Human Disease" (1989) shows reference to Rugg-Gunn A. J. "Starchy foods and fresh fruit: their relevant importance as a source of dental caries in Britain, London: Health Education Council, 1986 (occasional paper; No. 3)" as included in its consideration of the cariogenicity of fresh fruit as eaten by humans.

Macfarlane Trust

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what payments have been made, and on what dates, to the Macfarlane Trust to help those infected with HIV; and what proposals he has to keep this fund topped up to meet future needs.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A payment of £10 million was made to the Macfarlane Trust on 16 March 1988. Payments have been made to the trust annually in respect of its administrative costs. The Government have made it clear that the amounts available to the trust would be kept under review.

Employment (Learning Difficulties)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the Welsh initiative for specialised employment on the effect of residential costs on the livelihood of people with learning difficulties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: None.

District Nurses

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by health authority the number of full-time equivalent district nursing posts and the number of potentially elderly domiciliary clients, as defined by the Department of the Environment under section 80 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, for 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available.

Transport Pollution

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide details of current Department sponsored research *(a)* as to the links between transport pollution and health and *(b)* the reported growth in incidents of asthma in children.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department is not currently supporting any such research.

Homeopathic Medicines

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost of an item of homeopathic medicine on the national health service and the corresponding figure for its conventional counterpart.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available in the form requested.

Acute Patients

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average number of days patients in acute wards spent in hospital in each year from 1987 to the present in *(a)* Yorkshire health authority and *(b)* Scunthorpe district health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The information available centrally is given in the table.

Mean duration of stay in days of ordinary admissions to acute sector beds in NHS hospitals

Year	*Yorkshire region*	*Scunthorpe district*
1987-88	6·3	4·7
1988-89	5·8	4·4
1989-90	5·0	4·3

Mentally Disordered (Press Coverage)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date he received a copy of the Matthew trust report on the Press Complaints Commission and BBC regarding media coverage of the mentally disordered and distressed; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We received a copy of the report on 15 January 1992. The specific issues which the report raises about the Press Complaints Commission's code of practice and the editorial policy of the BBC are primarily a matter for those bodies.

We have asked the chairman of the Special Hospitals Service Authority to investigate the complaints in the report alleging breach of confidentiality and to take any necessary action.

Southern Derbyshire Health Authority

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give figures for the real-terms change in spending by the Southern Derbyshire health authority since 1982.

Mr. Dorrell: The annual accounts of the Southern Derbyshire health authority record total revenue expenditure of £74·9 million (cash) for 1982-83 and £132·9 million (cash) for 1990-91. This represents an increase in real terms of some 14·1 per cent. measured at 1991-92 prices. Over this period in-patient and day cases activity on a comparable basis has increased by 31 per cent.

Fluoride

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures exist to ensure that water fluoridation is introduced only where there is clear public support for such a measure.

Mr. Dorrell: It is for district health authorities to make decisions to apply to water undertakers to increase the fluoride content in the drinking water supplied by them. Section 89 of the Water Industry Act 1991 lays down procedures to be followed by district health authorities. The procedures include wide publication of proposals and consulting each of the local authorities whose areas are involved.

SCOTLAND

Primary School Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost of Scottish Education Department officials attending public meetings in Scotland in support of national testing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: About £160.

Construction Projects

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those construction projects undertaken by the Scottish Office in conjunction with the private sector since 1979, and subject to a local planning inquiry, which involved the formal conclusion of a joint commercial contract in advance of the construction of the local planning inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* No joint commercial contracts for the execution of Scottish Office construction projects subject to public local inquiry have been entered into since 1979 except in the case of proposals for the Skye bridge. This is the first project to be advanced using procedures in the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (the relevant sections of which came into force on 21 October 1991) that envisage the signing of a contract in advance of any public local inquiry that may be held. However, execution is still conditional on the outcome of the inquiry.

School Crossing Patrols

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what criteria are recommended by his Department for use by regional and islands councils when deciding to establish school crossing patrols;

(2) if he will publish the number of existing school crossing patrols per 1,000 head of school population for each relevant local authority in Scotland;

(3) what guidance is given to local authorities about steps to be taken when school crossing patrols are withdrawn.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* Section 26 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 enables regional and islands councils in Scotland to provide school crossing patrols. Guidance on the establishment of school crossing patrols is contained in technical memorandum SH7/87 issued to regional and islands councils by the Scottish Office in December 1987 after consultation with local authorities and the police. The guidance does not specifically deal with the withdrawal of particular crossing patrols.

Information about the number of school crossing patrols per head of school population is not held centrally.

Nursery Care

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide an estimate of the money spent by the education authorities in Scotland in 1990-91 and 1991-92 on providing education and nursery care for three and four-year-olds.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* The latest available figures for net revenue expenditure by local authorities in Scotland on nursery education and day nurseries are:

	£ million	
	1989-90	*1990-91*
Nursery Education	39·7	45·2
Day Nurseries	11·8	[1]13·5

[1] provisional

Expenditure on provision for three and four-year-olds specifically is not available.

Planning Inquiries

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the average length of time involved between the conclusion of a local public inquiry into a planning matter and *(a)* the submission to him of the reporter's recommendations and *(b)* his public response to the reporter's recommendations; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 February 1992]*: The length of time varies, but it usually takes about three weeks of reporting time for each week of inquiry. If parties request the right to comment on part I of the report, that consultation process can add four weeks to the time taken to submit the completed report to my right hon. Friend.

During the year to 31 March 1991, the average time which elapsed between submission of the report to my right hon. Friend and the issue of his decision was 14 weeks. In the current year the average time taken to decision is 10 weeks.

DEFENCE

Kirkcudbright Range

12. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning irregularities at the Kirkcudbright range.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: None—other than those from the hon. Member.

Procurement

13. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the amount of procurement orders placed with United Kingdom companies by his Department over the last two years.

Mr. Alan Clark: In the financial year 1989-90 we placed some 122,000 contracts, valued at £5·9 billion; and for 1990-91, about 90,000 valued at £6·3 billion.

19. **Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with industrialists in the defence sector regarding the release of information on his long-term procurement plans.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I regularly meet defence industrialists to dicuss a wide range of issues. Subject to necessary constraints of security and confidentiality, we would always wish companies to be briefed as fully as possible on future requirements in which they may have an interest.

AWE Aldermaston

14. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on safety at the atomic weapons establishment Aldermaston.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We place the highest priority on safety at Aldermaston. The establishment has an excellent safety record and the highest standards will continue to apply.

"Options for Change"

15. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the impact of proposals and decisions arising from "Options for Change" on defence establishments and defence-related enterprises within the Plymouth travel-to-work area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that we will continue to base Royal naval ships at Devonport. As part of our policy of matching training and support to the smaller front line, weapons processing will end at Royal naval armaments depot, Ernesettle and RAF Mountbatten will close. The effect on defence-related enterprises has to be a matter for the management of the companies concerned.

Helicopter Maintenance

16. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence is he can give details of the inquiry into tri-service third-line helicopter maintenance facilities; and if he will make a statement on the impact the report has concerning the future of the royal naval aircraft workshops, Almondbank, Perthshire.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The inquiry was a wide ranging efficiency scrutiny of helicopter repair work. I cannot say what implications the report might have for staff at RNAW Almondbank until its recommendations have been properly considered. But I can assure my hon. Friend that I fully recognise the skill and loyalty of the Almondbank work force.

RAF Fylingdales

17. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will pay an official visit to RAF Fylingdales.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend currently has no plans to do so, but I visited Fylingdales last March.

"Options for Change"

18. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the progress of the "Options for Change" programme in relation to the Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The measures affecting the Army are being brought into effect in a phased manner over the next few years in accordance with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's announcement of 23 July 1991.

Confidence-building Measures

20. **Sir Patrick Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to meet Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, Defence Minister of the Commonwealth of Independent States to discuss confidence-building measures.

Mr. Tom King: I met Marshal Shaposhnikov on 30 January when he accompanied President Yeltsin on a visit to London. We discussed a wide range of subjects of mutual interest, including ways in which the United Kingdom might provide assistance in the fields of nuclear weapons disposal and defence management.

Nuclear Deterrent

21. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure the effectiveness of Her Majesty's Government's nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government are proceeding with plans to replace Polaris with Trident and intends in due course to update Britain's sub-strategic nuclear capability. Taken together, these measures will ensure that our independent nuclear deterrent remains credible and effective well into the next century.

Submarines

22. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met representatives of the fishing industry to discuss submarine activities.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence I met fishing industry representatives to discuss submarine issues in June 1991. In addition I discussed the same issues with an all-party group of MPs in November 1991.

Nuclear Weapons

23. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the change in the level of the threat to the United Kingdom posed by nuclear weapons in the former Soviet republics since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Tom King: The threat of nuclear confrontation in Europe has greatly reduced: but it will take many years to reduce the huge nuclear arsenal of the former Soviet Union, and the Commonwealth of Independent States faces an uncertain future and there are risks of nuclear proliferation elsewhere. The Government will therefore maintain an effective, minimum deterrent.

Small Arms Firing Ranges

24. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to publish the guidelines for the construction of small arms firing ranges.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to publish any such guidelines. Broad technical advice on range safety (including range construction) is however provided to civilian shooting clubs through the National Rifle Association and the National Small-Bore Rifle Association.

Household Division

25. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received regarding his proposed cuts in the public duties of the Household Division.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have received a number of representations regarding the execution of public duties by the Household Division all of which have been noted.

Queen Victoria School, Dunblane

26. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support his Department gives to the Queen Victoria school, Dunblane, for the education of the sons of people serving in the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Queen Victoria school, Dunblane is funded almost entirely from Ministry of Defence votes.

HMS Endurance

27. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the disposal of the ship's bell belonging to HMS Endurance.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The bell from HMS Endurance is at present held at HM naval base Portsmouth. Applications for the bell have been received from a number of interested parties but no firm decision has yet been made about its future.

Training Land

28. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review is presently taking place of the need to retain all current training land in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As the planned restructuring of our Armed Forces will mainly result in a reduction in the number of units based in Germany, the need for training land in the United Kingdom is unlikely to diminish. Indeed, it could marginally increase. A number of studies are in progress aimed at setting out our future training requirements including frequency, priority, duration and space and at matching these requirements with our available training facilities. The precise impact of these studies on existing training areas and ranges is not yet clear.

Iraq (Military Equipment)

29. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what analysis his Department has made of the effectiveness of the military equipment available to Iraq during the Gulf war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The equipment of the Iraqi armed forces included a wide range of systems of varying age, origin and effectiveness. Examination of recovered equipment in collaboration with the allies is still in progress.

Iraq (UN Inspection)

30. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the findings of the United Nations team investigating production facilities and stockpiles of mass destruction weapons in Iraq.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The findings of the United Nations special commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency investigating Iraq's compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 687 were last circulated in United Nations document S/23268 of 4 December 1991, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The United Nations special commission is still far from satisfied that Iraq h[illegible] provided all the information required by SCR 687. A report reflecting the Secretary-General's latest assessments of Iraqi compliance will shortly be circulated as a United Nations document; a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Quality Assurance Laboratory Services

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has completed his studies into the future of his Department's quality assurance laboratory services.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department announced on 6 August 1991 that "Options for Change" reductions had made it necessary to review the plan announced in 1989, to relocate the Ministry of Defence's quality assurance staff at the Preston farm site on Teesside. A study was set in hand to compare the costs and benefits of that course with the alternative option of merging the quality assurance laboratory services with those of the Defence Research Agency on sites operated by the latter.

The study has now been completed. The impact of reductions in the defence programme for the 1990s is such that the most economical and operationally effective way ahead for the quality assurance technical support division is for it to be dispersed and consolidated into the Defence Research Agency, which will have considerable spare capacity on its existing sites. This will result in capital savings of more than £40 million and running costs savings rising to £9 million a year.

The Ministry of Defence has therefore been able to release the site at Preston farm which will be available, through the Teesside development corporation, for commercial development. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment is today making an announcement about future developments on the site.

Hunting

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which organisations and individuals he has consulted in the past 18 months regarding nature conservation on Ministry of Defence land where licences are issued to allow foxhunting and deerhunting.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence consults the local MOD conservation group where hunting licences cover an area with a nature conservation interest and it is designated as a site of special scientific interest. These groups consist of individuals and organisations representing the specific conservation interests of a particular site.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *185*, when the fees payable by fox hunts for licences to hunt on Ministry of Defence land were last increased.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The hunting licences where fees are payable were last increased in 1988.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *186*, if he will publish the regulations or codes of good conduct attached to or relating to licences issued to hunt on Ministry of Defence land.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Hunts are expected to abide by the respective codes of conduct of the recognised hunting organisations. It is not possible to give details of the regulations applying to each licence as each one is different depending on the establishment concerned and its usage.

Trident

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the United States decision to cancel production of W88 warheads for multiple-warhead nuclear missiles will have on the Royal Navy's Trident programme; whether W76 warheads of the type that are now to be used in United States Navy strategic submarines are compatible with and available for use in British SSBN boats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The United Kingdom's Trident system will use warheads which have been designed, and are being manufactured, in the United Kingdom. The United States decision will not, therefore, affect the United Kingdom Trident programme.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now review the requirement for Trident following the cancellation of the Trident warhead production programme in the United States.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. Trident is essential if the United Kingdom is to maintain an effective and credible nuclear deterrent into the next century.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now make it his practice to release information on *(a)* the Trident programme and *(b)* the date on which he will order the SSN 20; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made a statement on the Trident programme earlier today. On the SSN20 order, I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Gentleman on 29 November 1991 at column *684*.

Defence Budget

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has plans to make any further savings in the defence budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government's future intentions for defence expenditure are set out in the 1991 Autumn Statement and provide funding for the new force structure described in the Statement on the Defence Estimates, 1991 (Cm 1559). There are no plans to change these forecasts.

Iraq

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his United States counterpart regarding the export of equipment to Iraq by the firm Terex.

Mr. Alan Clark: None.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the ability of the Iraqi Government to convert civil equipment into Scud missile launchers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Scud launcher production is subject to United Nations monitoring under Security Council resolution 687, which calls for both the elimination of launchers themselves and of the associated production capability. Although Iraq assembled fixed and mobile launchers for its longer range Scud missiles before the Gulf conflict, it would face some difficulty in converting civil equipment to this purpose. Such equipment would need to be of correct specification which may not be readily available in Iraq and which would be hard to obtain under the current United Nations economic sanctions.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the military significance of equipment exported to Iraq by the firm Terex; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has noted recent allegations in the press and is looking into the matter together with the Department of Trade and Industry. But I am not at present aware of any exports of military equipment to Iraq by Terex.

Operation Granby

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes to his policy of chartering merchant vessels have been made as a result of Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Pending the outcome of current work within the Department, no changes have been made.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the MoD police fraud squad is investigating the alleged fraud in the chartering of merchant vessels to support Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Ministerial Speeches

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department keeps centralised records of all speeches and media interviews given by departmental Ministers speaking in areas of departmental responsibility.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

ENERGY

Fuel Exports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will provide a breakdown of the figures underlying the figures for net exports of fuel in 1991 given in his press notice of 27 January; and if he will indicate how imported electricity from France is treated in the calculation.

Mr. Wakeham *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* The convention used in the balance of payments, when comparing imports and exports, is to record figures on an "f.o.b. basis" (i.e. free on board). The figures used in the Department's press notice of 27 January are consistent with the balance of payments figures published by the Central Statistical Office on the same day. Figures on electricity imports are included and were obtained from Customs and Excise data in the same way as those for other fuels. Figures for 1991 are as follows:

	Coal and other solid fuels	*Crude oil*	*Petroleum products*	*Natural gas*	*Electricity*	*Total*
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£ million*	*£ million*
Imports (f.o.b.)	n/a	3,698	n/a	n/a	n/a	7,064
Exports (f.o.b.)	98	4,440	2,630	—	—	7,168
Net exports (f.o.b.)	n/a	742	n/a	n/a	n/a	104

n/a Figures on an f.o.b. basis are not available separately for fuel categories other than oil.
— Less than £0·5 million.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Council Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if there are any plans under the council tax benefit scheme to alter the position of the groups currently exempt from deductions for non-dependents; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The proposed system of non-dependent deductions in council tax benefit will follow broadly the rules which apply in housing benefit. However, exemption from deductions will be extended to include non-dependents on income support, or those who would otherwise give rise to a discount.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated number of disability working allowance claimants in 1992-93 who will be liable to pay income tax.

Mr. Scott: Disability working allowance is a new tax-free benefit to be introduced from April this year. It is not possible to estimate the number of disability working allowance recipients who will be liable to pay income tax on other income in 1992-93.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated administrative cost of disability working allowance for 1992-93.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability working allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

State Benefits (South Yorkshire)

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many south Yorkshire families were dependent on state benefits in 1979, 1990 and the latest available date in 1991.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

European Year of Elderly People

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans his Department is making for the European year of elderly people and solidarity between the generations in 1993.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health, has lead responsibility in this area, and I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, on 3 February.

Housing Benefit

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefit applications were determined by each local authority in Northamptonshire in each year since 1980-81.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information is as follows:

Number of Housing Benefit Claims Received

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Corby	4,714	10,652	13,293
Daventry	2,607	3,639	8,246
East Northampton	7,882	11,138	7,309
Kettering	10,131	9,722	8,509
Northampton	5,558	n.a.	10,208
South Northants	n.a.	n.a.	2,793
Wellingborough	n.a.	n.a.	10,725

Notes:

(i) n.a. = information not available.
(ii) Data is not available for years prior to 1988-89.
(iii) Unsuccessful applications are included in these figures.
(iv) Information on the determination of applications is not collected.
(v) *Source:* Housing Benefit Management Information System.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefit review boards heard cases in each of the years 1989, 1990, and 1991, respectively; how many were decided in the claimants' favour and how many claimants were represented.

Miss Widdecombe: Information for calender years is not available, however, the housing benefit and community charge benefit management information system suggests that, in 1989-90, approximately 3,000 requests for a further review by a review board were reported, of which, about 700 resulted in a revised determination.

In 1990-91, approximately 3,000 such requests were reported, of which, about 500 resulted in a revised determination.

Data as to the number of review boards decided in the claimants' favour and claimant representation are not available.

Mobility and Attendance Allowance

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the numbers of *(a)* initial claims and *(b)* renewal claims for mobility allowance and attendance allowance in 1991; how many were (i) refused and (ii) refused but later awarded on review.

Mr. Scott: In 1991, there were 231,000 initial and 45,000 renewal claims for mobility allowance. 120,000 claims were unsuccessful. 11,000 awards were made following a review.

There were 539,000 initial and subsequent claims to attendance allowances. 108,000 claims were unsuccessful. Complete information is not available about renewal claims to attendance allowance, although of some 45,000 processed by regionally located disability benefit centres, the majority resulted in an award. Information is not available about the success rate, on review, of unsuccessful initial and renewal claims.

Notes:

1. Claims for both mobility allowance and attendance allowance which were received in 1991 were not necessarily processed in that year.

2. Generally a renewal claim is one which is made on an existing limited period award to extend that award, but a subsequent claim is one made following disallowance of an earlier claim or sometime after a previous award has lapsed.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the reasons for refusing attendance allowance during the 12 months to December 1991 where *(a)* an initial claim was refused and *(b)* an existing claim was withdrawn; and how many claimants were affected in each category.

Mr. Scott: Such information as is available is in the tables.

Initial claim refused

	Number
Medical criteria not satisfied	107,678
Constant attendance allowance total overlap	10
Residence and presence tests not satisfied	77
	107,765

Existing claim withdrawn (by claimant or third party)

	Number
Deceased	8,561
Other reasons[1]	5,832
	14,393

[1] A detailed breakdown of this figure is not available.

Pensions

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be *(a)* the extra cost of increasing the state pension to £110 per week for a single person and £220 per week for a couple expressed as (i) total national cost and (ii) per contributor and *(b)* the corresponding reduction in the cost of housing benefit payments and income support payments if the pension figures in *(a)* were introduced.

Miss Widdecombe: The extra cost to the national insurance fund of increasing the basic state retirement pension to £110 per week and £220 for a married couple in 1991-92 would be £30·4 billion. The corresponding reduction in the combined cost of income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit would be £3·1 billion

The combined extra weekly cost of this change in national insurance contributions for a man on average earnings and his employer would be £39·50 per week.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the areas where the cold weather payments have so far been paid in 1992; and also the number of areas where such payments have not been paid.

Mr. Scott: Such information as is available is in the Library.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action is required to establish that an applicant for a national insurance number is properly resident in the United Kingdom and is so entitled; and if he will make a statement on the enforcement of these conditions.

Mr. Jack: On receipt of an application for a national insurance number we require acceptable and verifiable evidence of identification. This could include a birth certificate, a passport or a Home Office immigration form. The Home Office is informed in any case where a passport indicates that there is a restriction on taking up employment in the United Kingdom or where there is a limit on length of stay which has expired, or is about to expire.

Questions on residence are matters for my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated total amount payable to personal pension schemes from the national insurance fund in respect of the year 1991-92; and what increase in the basic retirement pension could be given at the same cost.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 24 January 1992]*: By December 1991, 4·6 million people had taken out personal pensions as an alternative to remaining in SERPS. The Government Actuary estimates that the amount of revenue foregone by the national insurance fund in respect of 1991-92 will be £2,740 million made up of £2,055 million in respect of the contracted out rebate, similar to that available to contracted-out occupational pension schemes, and £685 million in respect of the additional 2 per cent. incentive.

This gross cost does not take into account the numbers of people who would join a contracted out occupational pension scheme if appropriate personal pensions were not available, nor does it take into account the future reduced burden of the national insurance fund brought about by people being in receipt of a personal pension rather than SERPS.

The gross sum referred to above would not, therefore, be available to fund increases in the basic retirement pension.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 February 1992

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mr. Malde Modhwadia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the letter dated 24 January from Mr. Noon, the solicitor to Mr. Malde Modhwadia; and when he will be in a position to award compensation.

Mr. John Patten: The application for compensation was received on 27 January. A decision will be reached as soon as possible.

British Legion Medals

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will authorise police officers to wear on their uniforms the national service medal issued by the Royal British Legion.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Police (Recorded Incidents)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the number of recorded incidents per uniformed police officer in *(a)* the Metropolitan police area, *(b)* Surrey and *(c)* the Northumbria police authority area in 1991.

Mr. John Patten: The latest available figures, in terms of notifiable offences recorded by the police, per police officer, in the 12 months to September 1991 are *(a)* 32 offences in the Metropolitan police area, *(b)* 30 offences in Surrey, and *(c)* 63 offences in Northumbria.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been employed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and in what capacity for the past 12 years;

(2) what are his future plans for funding the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board;

(3) how many claims the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board has dealt with on an annual basis, for the past 12 years;

(4) what has been the cost incurred by the operation of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board expressed annually, for the past 12 years.

Mr. John Patten: The available information for the last 12 financial years is shown in the table.

Financial Year	*Number of staff employed by the Board (average in post during year)*	*Number of Board Members (including Chairman)*	*Number of applications resolved*	*Total compensation paid (£ millions)*	*Total administration costs (£ millions)*
1979-80	156	18	21,113	15·7	1·9
1980-81	155	20	26,277	21·5	2·9
1981-82	163	20	22,557	21·9	3·2
1982-83	163	21	26,098	29·4	3·7
1983-84	182	20	29,705	32·8	3·8
1984-85	189	22	27,450	35·3	4·2
1985-86	203	29	29,965	41·5	4·4
1986-87	214	29	29,605	48·2	5·5
1987-88	267	31	29,150	52·1	6·8
1988-89	312	38	38,830	69·4	7·5
1989-90	332	39	38,620	72·7	9·1
1990-91	368	43	53,384	109·3	10·3
1991-92[1]	380	44	61,000	144·6	13·1

[1] All estimated figures.

Most of the board's staff are seconded civil servants graded from administrative officer to higher executive officer, and engaged in the preparation of applications for decision by the board and associated administrative tasks. There are also small numbers of senior managers and legal and secretarial staff.

Plans for funding for the board for the next three years are as follows:

£ million

	1992-93	*1993-94*	*1994-95*
Compensation	143·5	157	161
Administration	15·3	17·4	17·4
Total provision	158·8	174·4	178·4

Polish People

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to review immigration procedures for Polish people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As with other nationalities, Polish nationals must meet the requirements of the immigration rules for entry to the United Kingdom. In common with the citizens of 81 other countries or territorial entities, Polish nationals are subject to a United Kingdom visa requirement.

A recent review of the visa requirement has led my right hon. Friend to conclude that it is too soon to assess the experience of some of our European partners who have abolished visas for Polish nationals. My right hon. Friend has decided therefore to look once more at the need for this requirement in the summer when the impact of visa abolition on other member states of the Community may have become more apparent.

Immigrant Population (Funding)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total Government expenditure on funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 for 1991-92, itemised by borough and district identifying for each borough and district the amount of expenditure; how much of that expenditure was for education itemised by borough and district; and how much was for each of the other service areas eligible for grant, itemised by borough and district.

Mrs. Rumbold: The figures for grant to be paid in 1991-92 are not yet available.

Convicted Criminals' Admissions (Northumbria)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Northumbria as to what proportion of the crime clear-up rate for 1990-91 in Northumbria is accounted for by voluntary admission made by convicted criminals; how many detectives were employed to obtain these admissions; and when the practice ceased.

Mr. John Patten: The available information, for 1990, shows that, of the 77,000 notifiable offences cleared up by the police in Northumbria, 29·4 per cent. were cleared up by an interview of convicted offenders in custody. It is estimated that the equivalent of 40 officers were engaged in such interviews. The practice ceased at the beginning of December 1991.

Caring for Children

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effect of the Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations 1991 on police practice on disclosure of criminal records.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The police continue to disclose criminal records for the purpose of protecting children in accordance with Home Office circular 102/88. The regulations do not require a change of police practice.

Police, Hampshire

59. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the increase in the authorised establishment of police officers in Hampshire in each year since 1987.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the table and is provided on the basis of financial years:

Year	*Increase approved*
1987-88	Nil
1988-89	23
1989-90	20
1990-91	25
1991-92	27
1992-93	67

Court Escort Service

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the standard of service which will be expected of a private sector company contracted to operate the court escort service in the area comprising the east midlands and Humberside.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Work has now been completed on the specification for the operation under private sector management of the court escort service in the east midlands and Humberside. This forms part of the invitation to tender being issued to potential contractors today and a copy has been placed in the library. Subject to the receipt of satisfactory tenders, and value for money considerations, we would aim to award a contract in the summer; with the service in the area becoming operational under a private sector contractor early next year.

Magistrates Courts (Fees)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to increase fees for civil proceedings in the magistrates courts.

Mr. John Patten: I have today laid before Parliament a draft order varying the fees now prescribed in part I of schedule 6 to the Magistrates Courts Act 1980. The increases proposed are in many cases substantial because the present fees have not been varied for a substantial number of years and fall far short of recovering the full economic costs of the services provided in accordance with general Government policy on fees and charges. It is our intention that the new fees should be kept under regular review in future to avoid the need for major variations of this kind.

We recognise the need to ensure that access to magistrates courts is not closed off for financial reasons, and the draft order therefore makes it clear that no fees are chargeable from any person who is a legally assisted person within the meaning of section 2(11) of the Legal Aid Act 1988 or is in receipt of income support or family credit. Nor do the new fees affect the discretion of magistrates courts to remit fees conferred by section 138 of the Magistrates Courts Act 1980 where they judge this to be appropriate.

We have also taken the opportunity to simplify the current schedule of fees and to abolish those which are no longer in general use.

ENVIRONMENT

Armstrong Bridge, Newcastle

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations he has given to the representations of Jesmond Residents Association, Newcastle upon Tyne, about the public safety considerations of a further postponement in the restoration of the listed structure known as the Armstrong bridge.

Mr. Yeo: The Department's northern regional office has asked Newcastle city council, which owns the Armstrong bridge, for information about its current state of repair and its plans for carrying out work to it. Once the council's response has been received, consideration will be given as to whether intervention by the Secretary of State is necessary.

Housing Stock

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the councils which transferred their housing stock to new housing associations in 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Yeo: In 1989-90, Newbury borough council and Swale borough council transferred their housing to new housing associations. In 1990-91, 11 councils completed transfers. These were

Broadland District Council
North Bedfordshire District Council
Medina Borough Council
Rochester City Council
South Wight Borough Council
East Dorset District Council
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Ryedale District Council
South Bucks District Council
Christchurch Borough Council
Mid Sussex District Council

Housing Revenue

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many councils have been required to transfer funds from their housing revenue account to the general fund.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning to the hon. Member for Sheffield Brightside, on 16 January 1991, *Official Report*, column *647*.

Local Government (General Funds)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the highest amount paid by any council to the general fund in 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Portillo: The highest amount transferred by an English local housing authority from its housing revenue account to its general rate fund in 1989-90 was £30,023,050 by Rochester upon Medway city council. The highest amount transferred by an English local housing authority from its housing revenue account to its general fund in 1990-91 was £7,299,863 by the London borough of Barking and Dagenham.

The figures are taken from housing subsidy claim forms and are not audited.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of his Department's funding of the Housing Corporation *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the south-west region, for each year from 1989-90 to 1992-93.

Mr. Yeo: These are as follows:

£ million

	The Housing Corporation	*Corporation's west region*
1989-90	935	n.a.
1990-91	1,063	73
1991-92	1,614	136
1992-93	1,770	178

Prior to 1990-91 the Corporation did not set regional cash limits and therefore, regional expenditure figures were not available.

Sports and Leisure Management

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he is giving to local authorities to assist them in avoiding becoming victims of cartels in the field of sports and leisure management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: General advice on ways of promoting competition for services subject to compulsory competitive tendering is contained in Departmental circulars 19/88 and 1/91. Local authorities that suspect that there may be cartels operating in any area of activity should refer to the guidance note "Cartels: detection and remedies—A guide for local authorities", published by the Office of Fair Trading and describing the steps that authorities should take.

Planning Applications

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the outcome of the consultation exercise on giving effect to his commitment to publicity for all planning applications.

Mr. Yeo: I am pleased to announce today arrangements for compulsory publicity for all planning applications. The new procedures will ensure that interested parties have the opportunity to comment on all planning applications affecting them.

The new arrangement will allow local planning authorities the maximum possible discretion to continue using the procedures which many of them have had in place for a long time. They are as follows:

(a) local planning authorities will be responsible for publicising planning applications;
(b) the list of so-called "bad neighbour" developments in Article 11 of the General Development Order 1988 will be abolished, and the link with environmental statements, required under Regulation 12 of the Environmental Assessment Regulations, will be severed;
(c) developments requiring environmental statements, departures from the development plan, and those affecting rights of way will be subject to compulsory site notices and newspaper advertising;
(d) for other major development, site notices or neighbour notification (as appropriate) and newspaper advertising will be required;
(e) for minor development, site notices or neighbour notification (as appropriate) will be required;
(f) publicity for reserved matters and amendments to planning applications will be at the discretion of local planning authorities;
(g) the same procedures will apply to development by the Crown, and to local authorities' own development;
(h) my Department will issue a circular in advance of the new legislation. It will give advice on best practice, including what constitutes "major" and "minor" development, and on notification of decisions to those who have commented on planning applications.

I am making this announcement in advance of the new arrangements taking effect on 4 May, to allow local authorities time to digest the changes. But I look to them to implement the new procedures as soon as possible, and not just to wait until the new legislative requirements come into force.

Since most local planning authorities already undertake some form of publicity for planning applications, I do not believe these new procedures will represent a significant increase in costs overall. However, they will be taken into account when we next review planning application fees.

Landfill Directive

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to respond to the seventh report of the Environment Select Committee (HC-263) on the EC draft directive on the landfill of waste.

Mr. Baldry: I have today laid before the House copies of the Government's response to the seventh report from the House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment; the EC draft directive on the landfill of waste. Copies are also available in the Library. The Government broadly welcomes the Committee's report, which makes a number of useful points both about the draft EC landfill directive and about the management of waste in general. However, the Government take issue with the Committee on some points, most notably concerning a suggested strategic role for the proposed environment agency and the adequacy of the Department of the Environment's programme for waste-related research. Command Paper 1821, which is published today, seeks to clarify the Government's position on these and other issues raised by the Committee.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much he estimates will be raised from standard community charges on empty properties and second homes in England in 1992-93.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* This information is not available.

Sports and Leisure Management

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to temporarily halting the process of compulsory competitive tendering in local authority sports and leisure management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* There is no evidence to suggest that the vast majority of local authorities have not been able to meet the statutory timetable. However, my right hon. Friend is prepared to consider any requests which he might receive from individual authorities to defer in exceptional circumstances the relevant dates for compliance with the legislation.

TRANSPORT

Catamaran Crews

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those qualifications required by port and sea-going general purpose staff employed as crew members of a catamaran.

Mr. McLoughlin: No qualifications are required for port staff engaged in the operation of catamarans. The qualifications required by the operating crew of a sea-going catamaran carrying more than 12 passengers are deck and engineer officer certificates of competency and qualified category 1, 2 or 3 seamen. Other general purpose staff are classified as "adult seafarers", in addition to attending an approved basic sea survival course and periods of sea service they also undertake in-house company training on vessel familiarisation and emergency procedures. The appropriate number of persons practised in the handling and operation of liferafts must be carried.

Channel Tunnel (Access)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on proposals for direct access from the north-west region to the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail plans to run passenger and freight services between the channel tunnel and the north-west. It has announced that there will be freight terminals at Trafford Park in Manchester and Seaforth in Merseyside. A substantial programme of major road improvements, which will improve access between the north-west and the tunnel, is also under way.

Seat Belts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to standardise seat belt design for all passengers; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will require vehicle manufacturers to replace straps with standard seat belts.

Mr. Chope: Seat belt design is already standardised under European Community directive 77/541/EEC as amended and adapted by directives 81/576/EEC, 82/319/EEC and 90/628/EEC. These standards do not specify three-point belts in all cases since for many in-board seating positions it is only technically possible for two anchoring points to be fitted.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research his Department is carrying out into the potential dangers of the wearing of single strap seat belts;

(2) what statistical information he has on injuries associated with the wearing of single strap seat belts.

Mr. Chope: Statistics on injuries caused by the wearing of lap belts in the United Kingdom are not available, but research in the United States indicates that lap belts reduce death and serious injury by 25 to 40 per cent. and three-point belts by 40 to 50 per cent. Although there is no current research specifically into this topic, the Department is monitoring the effectiveness of all seat belts, in its accident crash investigations.

Class 158 Trains

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions class 158 trains have failed to activate track circuits; what the reasons were; on how many of these occasions they also failed to activate automatic signals; and if he will make a statement on the safety implications of these incidents.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail has informed me that its record show 52 occasions on which class 158 trains have failed to activate track circuits. It has no information on how many of these related to track circuits controlling automatic signals. A build-up of leaf mulch on the train wheels is the principal cause. BR assures me there has been no equipment failure.

The problem causes a momentary loss of indication of the train on signalbox panels, but because the loss is apparent to the signalman, safety is not jeopardised. BR is addressing the matter urgently and the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is keeping closely in touch with developments.

High-Speed Trains (Accidents)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with representatives from the railways inspectorate concerning accidents caused due to falls from high-speed trains.

Mr. Freeman: Her Majesty's railway inspectorate is leading a Health and Safety Executive investigation into the pattern of falls from passenger trains at the request of the Health and Safety Commission. I expect to receive advice from the commission on this matter when the report of the investigation is published in the spring.

Train Doors

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent British Rail has implemented the recommendations made early last year by Knight Wendling Consultants in the report of its investigations into BR slam-shut doors.

Mr. Freeman: The Knight Wendling report made seven recommendations calling for further action or investigation by the British Rail Board. I understand from British Rail that action has been taken as follows:

Recommendation 1	which called for a thorough statistical review has been acted upon and is nearing completion.
Recommendation 2	called for revised safety notices. New notices have been designed for Mark II and Mark III stock and the programme of installation is largely completed.
Recommendation 3	which called for a computer simulation, has been undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive in co-operation with the BR Board. The results of this will be published in the report of the HSE investigation.
Recommendation 4	required BR to consider and evaluate various engineering steps to improve safety. Much work has been done on this already and further work is being undertaken.
Recommendation 5	which called for BR to undertake a thorough examination of all locks and doors has been fully implemented.
Recommendation 6	which required BR to provide a special gauge for checking locks has been implemented.
Recommendation 7	which called for a safety campaign has been implemented through the provision of posters at stations and spoken announcements on trains.

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *405*, if he will ask the Health and Safety Executive to release their early findings on the reliability of slam-shut doors to enable British Rail to take urgent interim measures before the production of the final Health and Safety Executive report in the spring.

Mr. Freeman: The Health and Safety Executive intends to publish its report on the investigation into the pattern of falls from train doors as soon as it is ready. In the meantime the executive is maintaining close liaison with British Rail about the investigation.

ENERGY

Nuclear Safeguards

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the content and purpose of the proposals to strengthen international nuclear safeguards that were submitted by the European Community to the International Atomic Energy Agency earlier in the current year.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 18 October 1991, at column *298*, and 13 January 1992, at column *478*, to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). I have nothing further to add to these.

Nuclear Installations

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he is taking to ensure that the population groups most at risk from British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. plants at *(a)* Capenhurst and *(b)* Sellafield in the case of an emergency are correctly identified; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The population groups potentially at risk from an emergency at a civil nuclear plant in the United Kingdom are identified as being within a planning zone surrounding each plant. The boundary of this zone is defined in relation to the accident with the greatest off-site consequences which can reasonably be predicted given the design of the plant, its protective systems and its operating limits. Within the zone, detailed emergency plans are prepared to protect the public.

Documents outlining the emergency arrangements at Sellafield and Capenhurst have been placed in local public libraries. Population groups within the planning zone for Sellafield have also been informed of the action they would be advised to take in the event of an emergency in a leaflet prepared and distributed to them by the local community liaison committee for the Sellafield site. A similar leaflet will shortly be distributed within the zone for Capenhurst.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

11. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on progress of the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[pursuant to his reply, 11 November 1991, c. 773-74]*: Experience of the home energy efficiency scheme—HEES—over its first year of operation has shown that the scheme has been well received and meets a real need. I am therefore increasing funding available in 1992-93 by some 50 per cent. However, it has also indicated that some changes are desirable to offer further protection to low-income households, promote higher standards of workmanship and encourage improved access to the scheme through a more uniform pattern of work. I will therefore shortly be introducing new regulations which will allow a package of changes from 1 April.

The most important effect of these changes will be to limit those who may do work under the scheme to network installers and to contractors who have been listed to undertake work in specific geographic areas under a new arrangement. Such a change will allow greater control over contractors who are not network installers, whilst maintaining the principle of customer choice. Applicants will still be able to carry out work themselves.

From 1 April, a new benefit, disability working allowance, will be added to the list of qualifying benefits for HEES. The maximum grant for each type of work allowable under HEES, with the exception of energy advice, will be raised by around 7 per cent.; the client contribution will be raised by a similar proportion. The present lower grant maximum for work undertaken by trainees will be abolished.

In addition to these changes, a number of other minor amendments will be made which are designed to improve the administration of the scheme. I have today placed in the Library copies of a press release which gives details of these and the other changes.

The increased funds which have been made available to the scheme for 1992-93 and these changes are expected to enable around 240,000 homes to be treated under the scheme in the year.

WALES

Snowdonia

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the Snowdonia national park committee concerning the designation of Snowdonia as an environmentally sensitive area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The chairman of the committee has written to me proposing that Snowdonia national park be considered for designation as an environmentally sensitive area. I shall be meeting him, and the chairmen of the Pembrokeshire Coast and Brecon Beacons national parks, in the near future to hear their views.

Condensation and Dampness

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce a scheme whereby additional financial resources can be made available to local housing authorities in Wales to overcome problems of condensation or dampness in their council housing stock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I have no plans to make additional resources available for this specific purpose. It is for individual authorities to decide what priority to give to measures to reduce condensation and dampness, which could include advice to their tenants on maintaining adequate heating and ventilation.

Local authority housing estates with particular problems may however be eligible for support under my proposed estates partnership scheme. Details of the programme will be announced in due course.

Council Housing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table of housing for each of the district councils for Wales showing *(a)* the total number of houses and flats currently owned by the council and *(b)* the number of these which were built prior to 1940.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Estimates of dwellings built before 1940 are not available: however, data are provided in the table from the 1986 Welsh inter-censal survey showing the proportion of the 1986 local authority stock built before 1945.

Local authority stock[1]

	Local authority stock of houses and flats at 1 April 1991	*Estimated percentage built prior to 1945*[2]
Aberconwy	2,516	36
Alyn and Deeside	4,883	30
Arfon	4,800	41
Blaenau Gwent	9,777	14
Brecknock	2,652	15
Cardiff	18,816	26
Carmarthen	3,357	16
Ceredigion	3,193	11
Colwyn	2,450	30
Cynon Valley	4,924	11
Delyn	4,512	20
Dinefwr	2,398	16
Dwyfor	1,398	22
Glyndŵr	2,822	25
Islwyn	5,807	19
Llanelli	6,580	25
Lliw Valley	4,850	33
Meirionnydd	1,962	21
Merthyr Tydfil	6,453	11
Monmouth	4,698	18
Montgomery	4,164	15
Neath	5,219	24
Newport	12,784	7
Ogwr	9,041	14
Port Talbot	5,483	20
Preseli Pembrokeshire	5,333	14
Radnorshire	1,124	12
Rhondda	4,797	12
Rhuddlan	2,608	27
Rhymney Valley	9,508	13
South Pembrokeshire	2,672	10
Swansea	16,300	29
Taff-Ely	6,766	18
Torfaen	12,936	13
Vale of Glamorgan	5,808	20
Wrexham Maelor	14,908	26
Ynys Môn	5,277	13
TOTAL	223,576	20

Source: Welsh Office local authority returns.
Welsh Inter Censal Survey, 1986.

[1] Montgomery includes 1,170 rented New Town dwellings in Newtown at 1 April 1991. Newtown dwellings are also included in the calculation of the percentage for Montgomery, as are those of Cwmbran for Torfaen.

[2] These estimates relate to the stock of local authority dwellings in April 1986.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many powered wheelchairs issued by his Department are currently in use by disabled people in Wales; and how many such wheelchairs were issued to new applicants in 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In Wales, the responsibility for the issue of wheelchairs—both powered and non-powered—lies with the artificial limb and appliance service. Since April 1988, the day-to-day management of the service has been undertaken by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, WHCSA. The information requested is not held centrally, and so I have asked the WHCSA to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what circumstances his Department issues powered wheelchairs; and what changes there have been in the eligibility rules for such wheelchairs during the past five years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Decisions on such matters are for the management of the artificial limb and appliance service, taking into account the specialist clinical advice available to it. I have asked the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to write to the hon. Gentleman on these matters.

Fish Testing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to institute a system of routine testing of indigenous fish in the rivers and lakes of Wales to monitor for the absorption of persistent poisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The chemical safety and nutritional value of the food supply are monitored to protect the consumer. This surveillance system includes an extensive programme covering fish caught commercially. It is impractical to monitor effectively fish caught for sport in freshwater, but, as a precautionary measure, the Government have issued advice to anglers not to consume fish from waters which the National Rivers Authority considers to be polluted.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate, in respect of the grant money in 1991-92 for agencies in Wales which provide services to combat alcohol misuse mentioned on page 42 of the Lord President's report on alcohol misuse *(a)* how much has been given to Alcohol Concern Wales, *(b)* Youthlink Wales and *(c)* local agencies.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The amounts allocated in 1991-92 are as follows:

	£
Alcohol Concern Wales	68,079
Youthlink Wales (including Council for Wales Voluntary Service)	54,660
Local Statutory and Voluntary Agencies	290,000

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the local agencies in Wales which have received grant aid from the grant money referred to on page 42 of the Lord President's report on alcohol misuse in 1991-92; and what was the figure granted in each case.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Not all allocations have been finalised. However, provisional allocations are as follows:

Funding initiative combating alcohol misuse in Wales

	£
Clwyd/Gwynedd	
Development Officer; Alcohol Information Centre (Rhyl); Administrative Officer; North Clwyd Alcohol Misuse Team; Counsellor Co-ordinator	66,000
Dyfed	
Development Officer and secretarial support	21,421
Dyfed Alcohol Advisory Service rental of accommodation	8,000
Appointment of Team Leader and secretarial support in Development of Local Alcohol Team, Pembrokeshire DHA	19,360
Regrading of Drugs Team Leader to substance abuse service manager. Pembrokeshire DHA	2,000
Gwent	
Development Officer	24,700
Ty Palmyra, part costs of Alcohol Project Worker	8,300
Powys	
Development Officer; Training Course for Nurse; Appointment of Nurse Specialist; Additional clerical staff	37,000
Mid Glamorgan	
Development Officer	[1]—
Social Service Sessions	[1]—
South Glamorgan	
Development Officer	11,452
1 Community Psychiatric Nurse	21,548
West Glamorgan	
Development Officer	
Counsellor, West Glamorgan Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse	15,626

[1] Details not yet submitted.

Theatres and Concert Halls

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which *(a)* theatres and *(b)* concert halls in Wales he has visited in his official capacity in the last 12 months.

Mr. David Hunt: In my official capacity I visited St David's hall on 1 March 1991 and Theatr Clwyd, Mold, on 3 May 1991.

Ecclesiastical Buildings

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what are the present proposals in relation to the removal of the ecclesiastical exemption from listed buildings control.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Office, along with the Department of the Environment, has today issued a consultation paper inviting comments on the proposal that the current exemption from listed building control should be removed from external works to listed ecclesiastical buildings of all denominations except those who can demonstrate that their internal administrative systems include adequate controls over such works. The paper also proposes clarification of the present arrangements relating to controls over buildings within the curtilage of listed ecclesiastical buildings. The consultation paper has been sent to ecclesiastical, local authority and conservation interests in Wales; a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Peru

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss human rights in Peru when he meets President Fujimori of Peru on 5 February.

The Prime Minister: I look forward to wide-ranging discussions with President Fujimori about matters of mutual concern including human rights.

Nuclear Weapons (Interviews)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all interviews he has given to the press and broadcasting media since 26 January on nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament.

The Prime Minister: The information is as follows:

BBC World Service, London	29 January 1992
Press Conference in Downing Street with President Yeltsin	30 January 1992
BBC TV/Radio, Sky TV, ITN—en route to New York	30 January 1992
Doorstep interview on arrival in New York	30 January 1992
CNN, CBS, ABC, NBC in New York	31 January 1992
Press Conference in New York with Mr. Boutros Ghali, United Nations Secretary General	31 January 1992
ITN in New York	31 January 1992

Nuclear Arms Reduction

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *111*, if the United Kingdom plans to submit any of its nuclear arms to multilateral nuclear arms reduction and disarmament talks over the next year.

The Prime Minister: When I met President Yeltsin in London he accepted that Trident would be a minimum deterrent, and that the focus of arms control negotiations should be on the arsenals of the United States and Russia. We have already announced plans to cut the United Kingdom's stockpile of sub-strategic nuclear weapons by about half.

EMPLOYMENT

Offshore Oil

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspectors or other officials are engaged in or connected with the safety of offshore oil operations in the North sea; and at what annual cost.

Mr. Forth: The number of staff employed in the Health and Safety Executive's offshore safety division on 1 February 1992 was 192. The budget allocated to the division for its payroll costs in 1991-92 is £5,726,000.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish a table showing the September 1991 estimates of number of employees in employment in Britain, and in each standard region for the overall total, male, part-time and full-time female employees and showing in each case how this differs from the equivalent original and revised estimates for September 1989;

(2) if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the original and *(b)* the revised estimates of employment of employees in each British standard region in September 1989 and September 1990 distinguishing between total employment, male employment, full-time employment for females and part-time employment for females.

Mr. Jackson: As the answer contains several statistical tables, I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Security Guards

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the average hourly *(a)* rates of pay and *(b)* average number of hours worked weekly by private security guards.

Mr. Forth: It is estimated from the April 1991 new earnings survey that average hourly earnings excluding overtime for "security guards and related occupations" were £5·07, and average total hours were 48·9 per week, of which 7·1 were overtime. The figures relate to full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was not affected by absence.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Central and Eastern Europe

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will define the precise standing of spending on central and eastern European projects within the provisions of the Overseas Development Administration budget; and for what reasons central and eastern Europe are not included in the statistical appendix of the publication "British Overseas Aid—the 1991 Review";

(2) if he will include a direct comparison between British overseas aid spending and the spending of other OECD Development Assistance Committee members in GDP percentage terms in future editions of the British overseas aid annual review.

Mrs. Chalker: The programme of assistance to central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is additional to, and separate from, the official United Kingdom aid programme for developing countries. The statistical appendix in the publication "British Overseas Aid—1991 Review" is concerned only with aid to and for the benefit of developing countries. The format of the next edition of the annual review is currently under discussion.

United Nations Development Fund for Women

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much Britain contributed financially to UNIFEM, in cash and real terms, for each year since 1979 to the present date.

Mrs. Chalker: UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1984. The United Kingdom has made annual voluntary contributions since 1985 as follows:

£'000s

	Cash Terms	1991 prices
1985	100	143
1986	50	69
1987	50	66
1988	50	62
1989	50	58
1990	100	107
1991	100	100

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Research Institutes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the research institutes operated for, or on behalf of, his Department and the total employment thereat.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department does not operate any research institutes directly, institutes, centres and units are operated by the research councils, with DES funding, as shown in the table. Some establishments are jointly operated with universities and other bodies; in these cases the numbers employed refer to research council employees only.

The list includes some centres and units operated by the research councils within higher education institutions. It does not cover other research undertaken in universities and other higher education institutions with funding from the Universities Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council and from the research councils.

Research institute	*Number of staff (full-time equivalent)*
Agricultural and Food Research Council	
Institute of Arable Crops Research (IACR)	
Rothampstead, Harpenden, Hertfordshire	422·0
Long Ashton, Bristol	207·5
Brooms Barn, Bury St. Edmunds	48·0
Total IACR	677·5
Institute of Animal Health (IAH)	
Compton, Newbury	206·5
Houghton, Huntingdon	112·0
Pirbright, Guildford	167·0
Neuropatogenesis Unit, Edinburgh	46·0
Total IAH	531· 5
Institute on Animal Physiology and Genetics Research (IAPGR)	
Babraham, Cambridge	291·0
Roslin, Edinburgh	246·5
Total IAPGR	537·5
Institute of Food Research (IFR)	
Reading	159·0
Norwich	244·0
Total IFR	403·0
Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER)	
Welsh Plant Breeding Station, Aberystwyth	251·0
Hurley, Maidenhead	184·0
North Wyke, Devon	40·5
Total IGER	475·5
Institute of Plant Science Research (IPSR)	
John Innes Centre, Norwich	321·5
Nitrogen Fixation Laboratory, Brighton	60·5
Total IPSR	382·0
Silsoe Research Institute	
Silsoe, Bedfordshire	288·0
Total AFRC	3,325
Medical Research Council	
National Institute for Medical Research, London	541·5
MRC Collaborative Centre, Mill Hill, London	30·5
MRC Blood Group Unit, London	11·0
MRC Cognitive Development Unit, London	13·0
MRC Child Psychiatry Unit, Denmark Hill, London	9·5
MRC Cyclotron Unit, Hammersmith Hospital, London	112·0
MRC Dental Research Unit, Newark Street, London	16·0
MRC Human Biochemical Genetics Unit, University College, London	22·0
MRC Human Movement and Balance Unit, Institute of Neurology, London	17·0
MRC Experimental Embryology and Teratology Unit, Tooting, London	21·5
MRC Epidemiology and Medical Care Unit, Northwich Park Hospital, Harrow	37·5
MRC/LRF Leukaemia Unit, Royal Postgraduate Medical School, London	10·0
MRC Mammalian Development Unit, University College, London	13·5
MRC Neurological Prostheses Unit, Institute of Psychiatry, London	7·0
MRC Muscle and Cell Motility Unit, Kings College, London	22·0
MRC Social and Community Psychiatry Unit, Institute of Psychiatry, London	12·5
MRC Toxicology Unit Carshalton, Surrey	131·0
MRC Tuberculosis and Related Infections Unit Hammersmith Hospital, London	17·0
Clinical Research Centre, Harrow, Middlesex	414·5
MRC Biochemical and Clinical Magnetic Resonance Unit, Oxford	9·0
MRC Cellular Immunology Unit, Oxford	16·5
MRC Immunochemistry Unit, Oxford	14·5
MRC Molecular Haematology Unit, Oxford	14·0
Institution of Molecular Medicine, Headington, Oxford	12·0
MRC Anatomical Neuropharmacology Unit, Oxford	16·5
MRC Clinical Pharmacology Unit, Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford	18·5
MRC Radiobiology Unit, Didcot, Oxfordshire	143·0
MRC Cell Mutation Unit, University of Sussex, Brighton	21·5
MRC Environmental Epidemiology Unit, Southampton General Hospital, Hampshire	23·5
Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge	43·0
Molecular Immunopathology Unit, Cambridge	21·0
Molecular Genetics Unit, Cambridge	15·5
Molecular Neurobiology Unit, Cambridge	19·5
Dunn Nutrition Unit, Cambridge	75·0
Clinical Onocolgy and Radiotherapeutics Unit, Cambridge	46·5
Protein Function and Design Unit, Cambridge	8·0
Applied Psychology Unit, Cambridge	63·0
Biostatistics Unit	16·5
Cambridge Centre for Protein Engineering (IRC),	14·0
Social and Applied Psychology Unit, Sheffield	30·0
Institute of Hearing Research, Nottingham	39·5
Meurochemical Pathology Unit, Newcastle	27·5
MRC Blood Pressure Unit, Glasgow	28·0
MRC Medical Sociology Unit, Glasgow	23·5
MRC Virology Unit, Institute of Virology, Glasgow	54·0
MRC Brian Metabolism Unit, Edinburgh	36·5

Research institute	*Number of staff (full-time equivalent)*
MRC Human Genetics Unit, Western General Hospital, Edinburgh	155·0
MRC Reproductive Biology Unit, Edinburgh	65·5
Total MRC	2,529·5
National Environment Research Council	
British Geological Survey	
Exhibition Road, London	3·0
Wallingford, Oxfordshire	51·0
Exeter, Devon	13·0
Hartland Point, Devon	1·0
Keyworth, Nottinghamshire	501·0
Newcastle	14·0
Eskdalemuir, Scotland	3·0
Edinburgh	220·0
Aberystwyth	13·0
Belfast	8·0
Total BGS	827·0
Marine and Atmospheric Sciences Directorate	
Unit of Aquatic Biochemistry, Stirling, Scotland	5·0
Culture Centre for Algae and Protozoa, Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory, Oban, Scotland	55·0
Institute of Oceanographic Science Deacon Laboratory, Wormley, Surrey Rennell Centre, Southampton	192·0
Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory, Bidston, Merseyside	91·0
Plymouth Marine Laboratory/Marine Biological Association, Plymouth	159·0
Sea Mammal Research Unit, Cambridge	17·0
Total Marine and Atmospheric Sciences	519·0
Terrestrial and Freshwater Sciences	
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology	
Banchory, Scotland	23·0
Bush, Edinburgh	60·0
Merlewood, Cumbria	61·0
Bangor, Wales	18·0
Monks Wood, Huntingdon	79·0
Furzebrook, Wareham, Dorset	26·0
Institute of Hydrology	
Balquidder, Scotland	2·0
Plynlimon, Wales	6·0
Wallingford, Oxfordshire	155·0
Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology, Oxford	61·0
Institute of Freshwater Ecology	
Bush, Edinburgh	4·0
East Stoke, Wareham,, Dorset	26·0
Monks Wood, Huntingdon	6·0
Windermere, Cumbria	66·0
Culture Centre for Algae and Protozoa, Windemere, Cumbria	6·0
Total Terrestrial and Freshwater Sciences	599·0
Scientific Services	
Banchory, Scotland	1·0
Bush, Edinburgh	1·0
Murchison House, Edinburgh	10·0
East Kilbridge, Glasgow	3·0
Bangor, Wales	1·0
Barry, Wales	78·0
Merlewood, Cumbria	3·0
Bidston, Wirral	4·0
Keyworth, Nottingham	39·0
Monks Wood, Huntingdon	8·0
Cambridge	2·0
Deacon Laboratory, Surrey	3·0
Millbank, London	1·0
Reading	4·0
Wallingford, Oxfordshire	20·0
Rennell Centre, Southampton	5·0
Wareham, Dorset	6·0
Plymouth	28·0
Swindon	46·0
Total Scientific Services	236·0
Total NERC	2,181·0
Science and Engineering Research Council	
Daresbury Laboratory, Warrington, Cheshire	596·5
Royal Greenwich Observatory, Cambridge	135·0
Royal Greenwich Observatory, Edinburgh	123·0
Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Didcot	1,319·0
Total Science and Engineering Research Council	2,173·5
Total all research councils	10,209·0

In addition the following AFRC employees are seconded to Horticultural Research International.

	Number of staff (full-time equivalent)
Littlehampton, West Sussex	205·0
East Malling, Kent	163·5
Wellesbourne, Stratford-upon-Avon	150·5
Total	579·0

Teacher Training

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what timetable he intends to follow in devising value-added indicators to be applied to examination results in the selection of schools to provide classroom-based teacher training.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend issued a consultation document about the Government's proposals for school-based secondary postgraduate certificate in education courses on 28 January. This explained that the Government intend to move to as soon as possible towards the use of performance indicators for the choice of partner schools—such as academic results, staying on rates, truancy rates and the destination of pupils in terms of employment or further and higher education; and that value-added factors could well be applied to examination results and national curriculum assessments, because it will be important for student teachers to experience schools that are successful in difficult circumstances.

The consultation period will last until the end of March. In the light of the outcome of the consultation, my right hon. and learned Friend will ask the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education to prepare detailed guidelines for the operation of partnerships between higher education institutions and schools, including appropriate performance indicators for use in the selection of schools.

Schools (Devonport)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now approve the reorganisation of Devonport schools in Plymouth.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to make a decision on these proposals shortly.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Service Pensions

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the average amount of occupational pension received by retired public servants.

Mr. Maples: Information about average pensions for all retired public servants is not kept centrally. The latest information which is available centrally is as follows:

Scheme	*Year*	*Number of pensioners*	*Average annual pension £*
Civil Service	1991-92	392,800	3,811
NHS (England and Wales)	1991-92	263,600	3,604
NHS (Scotland)	1991-92	44,200	3,236
Teachers (England and Wales)	1991-92	280,000	5,900
Teachers (Scotland)	1991-92	29,000	5,801
Local Government (England and Wales)	1988-89	482,500	2,169
Local Government (Scotland)	1989-90	81,600	2,010
Armed Forces	1991-92	255,000	3,886

Currency Values

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the average value of the pound against the deutschmark, the US dollar and the yen in each year since 1985; and the year on year changes as an index with 1985 as the base.

Mr. Maples: The annual average foreign exchange rates for the pound against the deutschmark, the US dollar and the Japanese yen in the years 1985 to 1991 were as follows:

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Deutschmark	3·7842	3·1828	2·9413	3·1236	3·0795	2·8759	2·9254
US Dollar	1·2976	1·4672	1·6392	1·7796	1·6383	1·7864	1·7685
Japanese Yen	307·08	246·80	236·50	227·98	225·66	257·38	237·56

Using 1985 as a base of 100 these exchange rates give the following index of year on year changes:

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Deutschmark	100	84	78	83	81	76	77
US Dollar	100	113	126	137	126	138	136
Japanese Yen	100	80	77	74	73	84	77

Notes: Index figures rounded

Citizens Charter

Mr. McFall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he expects the implementation of the citizens charter proposals to cost; and if he will provide an analysis of this figure Department by Department.

Mr. Maude: The Government have made extra resources available to priority public services whenever money can be afforded. The latest public expenditure plans were set out in the 1991 autumn statement, and in more detail in departmental reports—Cm 1901 to 1919. The citizens charter, however, is about finding better ways of converting the money that can be afforded into even better public services. I therefore expect citizens charter proposals to be implemented within the public spending plans already announced.

Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of employees he expects will, in April 1992, have an income in excess of £23,000.

Mr. Maples: It is estimated that approximately 10 per cent. of employees will have annual earnings of £23,000 in 1992-93.

Mortgage Arrears

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the number of people who are more than six months in arrears on their mortgage repayments.

Mr. Maples: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State on 17 October 1991, *Official Report*, column *211*. Statistics on arrears and repossessions for the second half of 1991 are to be published by the Council of Mortgage Lenders shortly.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the gross amount he expects to be raised by the community charge in 1992-93 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland;

(2) what estimates he has of the costs in 1992-93 of *(a)* community charge benefit and *(b)* the community charge reduction scheme;

(3) what estimates he has of the yield from community charge in 1992-93, net of community charge benefit and the community charge reduction scheme, for *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* A forecast of the net amount expected to be raised by the community charge for Great Britain in 1992-93 will be included in the Financial Statement and Budget Report. Figures for planned spending on community charge benefit and community charge reduction scheme are shown in table 5.3 of the "Supplement to the Autumn Statement", Cm 1920.

VAT

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the estimated effect, according to the Treasury model, on *(a)* growth in 1992-93 and *(b)* inflation, of a six-month cut in VAT starting on budget day of 1 per cent., 2 per cent., 2·5 per cent., 3 per cent., 4 per cent. and 5 per cent., respectively; and what would be the estimated net cost to the Exchequer allowing for increased revenue through growth in each case.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* It has not, since 1978, been practice to provide results from the Treasury model in response to parliamentary questions; but my hon. Friend will be aware that the current version of the model is available for Members' use through the Library of the House.

Local Authority Capital Spending

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing local authority capital spending, both gross cash investment and gross real investment, for each of the years from 1986-87 to 1992-93 and the annual percentage change.

Mr. Mellor: Information on local authority gross capital spending in the period 1986-87 to 1991-92 in both cash and real terms is given in the table. Corresponding information is not available for 1992-93, but the Government's illustrative projection is that, if local authorities were to spend from usable capital receipts and revenue contributions at a rate broadly similar to the current year, total gross capital spending would be of the order of £8½ billion.

Local authority gross capital expenditure in the United Kingdom by economic category, 1986-87 to 1991-92[1]

£ million

	1986-87 outturn	*1987-88 outturn*	*1988-89 outturn*	*1989-90 outturn*	*1990-91 outturn*	*1991-92 estimated outturn*
Cash						
Land and buildings	614	706	837	1,089	583	601
Construction	4,887	5,460	6,369	8,576	6,552	6,553
Vehicles, plant and machinery	825	798	897	1,055	617	628
Capital grants	828	925	963	1,121	992	976
Net lending	222	208	176	188	−50	10
Total	7,377	8,097	9,242	12,029	8,695	8,769
Real terms[2]						
Land and buildings	801	874	967	1,181	583	561
Construction	6,380	6,760	7,358	9,304	6,552	6,125
Vehicles, plant and machinery	1,078	988	1,036	1,144	617	587
Capital grants	1,081	1,145	1,113	1,217	992	913
Net lending	290	257	204	204	−50	9
Total	9,630	10,025	10,677	13,050	8,695	8,195

[1] The data given are consistent with figures published in the Statistical Supplement to the 1991 Autumn Statement (Cm. 1920).

[2] Cash figures adjusted to 1990-91 price levels by excluding the effect of general inflation. The deflator used is that for GDP at market prices adjusted to remove the distortion caused by the abolition of domestic rates.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Red Fox

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has concerning the current level of the wild population of the red fox; and whether there have been any significant recent changes in that population.

Mr. Maclean: The wild red fox population fluctuates depending on the time of year, with an estimated 500,000 foxes in England, Scotland and Wales at the end of the summer, falling to 250,000 by the end of winter. I have no details of any significant changes in this population in recent times.

Meat Tenderisers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of slaughterhouses that used papain as a meat tenderiser, the regions in which such slaughterhouses are located and the number of cattle involved in each year since 1986.

Mr. Maclean: The information is not available.

District Offices

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will announce the date when a decision will be given on the future of the Exeter and Truro MAFF divisional offices.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 21 January, *Official Report*, column *123*.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the total number of BSE confirmed cases in the United Kingdom in each year since 1986.

Mr. Gummer: There were 847 cases of BSE confirmed in the United Kingdom prior to the disease becoming notifiable on 21 June 1988. Since then the following cases have been confirmed in each year:

	Number
1988	1,316
1989	6,895
1990	12,928
1991	22,770

Wild Birds

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many wild birds have been imported into the United Kingdom during the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of captive birds, other than poultry or homing pigeons, imported into Great Britain is as follows. The figures do not distinguish between wild-caught birds and those which may have been bred in captivity. 1991 figures are not yet available.

Year	*Number*
1986	176,745
1987	163,699
1988	184,577
1989	184,601
1990	175,967

Sources: 1986-87: Annual return of proceedings under the Animal Health Act 1981. 1988-90: Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food statistics.

Food Supplements

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what submissions he has made to the European Commission concerning new European legislation on food supplements; what consultations he has had with representative organisations for nutritionists; and if he will make a statement on the main recommendations of the Denner report.

Mr. Maclean: The Department issued a statement on the recommendations in the Denner report on its publication on 27 March 1991. A copy was placed in the Library of the House. We subsequently consulted over 160 organisations on the report including those representing nutritionists. The European Commission have recently issued a discussion paper on dietary supplements which we have circulated to all those who commented on the Denner report. We will be making a submission to the Commission once views on the discussion paper have been received.

Milk

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which countries in the EC have milk marketing schemes.

Mr. Maclean: Under Community law member states may be authorised to grant organisations representing at least 80 per cent. of the number and 50 per cent. of the production of milk producers in their area exclusive rights to buy from them milk which they produce and market without processing. This is subject to the fulfilment of conditions relating to consumption and compliance with rules designed to prevent abuse of a dominant market position. The United Kingdom is the only member state authorised in this way.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) which measures he is considering to help the milk marketing board produce a more competitive and successful United Kingdom dairy industry;

(2) if he will make a statement on the results of his discussions with the dairy trade, the milk marketing board and the European Commission regarding the future of the milk marketing arrangements have had so far;

(3) if he will make a statement on his policy on the future of the milk marketing scheme;

(4) if the Government will support the milk marketing board's proposals for the transition to new arrangements for the milk marketing scheme.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom's statutory milk marketing arrangements, which have served producers well, cannot be sustained in the face of growing commercial and legal pressures. Nor are they sufficiently flexible to enable the United Kingdom industry to compete efficiently in an increasingly diverse market place. The Milk Marketing Board for England and Wales began considering the options open to it to meet these challenges in 1989 and the Government's approach has been to encourage the industry to come forward with its own proposals for change.

Rapid, but orderly, change to new non-statutory arrangements is essential. The Government are therefore looking to all five United Kingdom milk marketing boards to put forward detailed proposals for their replacement by Easter. The recent announcement by the Milk Marketing Board for England and Wales outlining the successor voluntary arrangements which it would like to see introduced follows discussion with Government, the EC Commission and the dairy trade and is a welcome step in this process. Both the Government and the EC Commission will wish to examine carefully the boards' detailed proposals when they are presented.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to set a final date for the notification of milk quota transfers in England and Wales in 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Following consultations with the industry and in exercise of powers provided by the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations I have decided that transfers of unused milk quota notified after 24 April will have no effect on the calculation of supplementary levy liability for 1991-92, even if they are notified as having occurred during that year.

Similar deadlines have operated for the past three years. These have encouraged producers to notify quota transfers in good time and have thus assisted in the smooth running of the quota system.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the figures on a county

basis in England for each year since 1988 of *(a)* the number of serious irregularities of the set-aside scheme, *(b)* the number of minor breaches of the scheme and *(c)* the number of cases where payments were witheld in full or in part; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 12 December 1991]*: This information is set out in the table, which includes updated figures of payments recovered in full or in part. Payments have not been recovered or withheld where detection of the infringement led to the participant leaving the scheme or taking corrective action before claiming any grant or where a warning was considered to be the most appropriate action.

In my answer on 18 November 1991, *Official Report*, columns *1-2*, I indicated that inspections during the 1990-91 set-aside year had identified 18 serious irregularities. Following further, detailed investigation, three of those irregularities have proved to be less serious than they initially appeared and are now listed as "other infringements". The number of recoveries is also higher than reported in November following completion of the necessary action in certain cases which were previously outstanding.

County	*1988-89*			*1989-90*			*1990-91*		
	Serious irregularity	*Other infringements*	*Payments recovered/ withheld in full or part*	*Serious irregularity*	*Other infringements*	*Payments recovered/ withheld in full or part*	*Serious irregularity*	*Other infringements*	*Payments recovered/ withheld in full or part*
Avon	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	—	2	2	—	2	2	—	4	2
Berkshire	—	3	3	—	8	8	—	7	3
Buckinghamshire	1	1	2	1	10	10	—	17	13
Cambridgeshire	—	3	3	—	3	3	—	6	5
Cheshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cleveland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1
Cornwall	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	3	3
Cumbria	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Devonshire	3	3	4	1	—	1	—	—	—
Dorset	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Durham	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Essex	—	1	—	—	3	1	—	3	2
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Greater London	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hereford and Worcester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	—
Humberside	—	—	—	—	3	—	2	4	2
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
Lancashire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leicestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2
Lincolnshire	1	—	1.	—	3	3	—	1	1
Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	—	5	—	—	9	5	—	2	2
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	9	9
Northumberland	—	1	1	—	1	1	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	1	—	1	5	—	5
Oxfordshire	—	3	2	1	10	10	1	14	10
Shropshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Staffordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	2	1
Surrey	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	1
East Sussex	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	2	—
West Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tyne and Wear	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Warwickshire	5	—	4	—	—	—	2	—	2
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	4	1
West Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1
TOTAL	12	23	24	8	59	51	15	86	68

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Risk Guarantees

Sir Robert McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration has been given to providing risk guarantees to commercial enterprises in the United Kingdom in respect of tourism projects in eastern Europe.

Mr. Sainsbury: The normal range of Export Credits Guarantee Department facilities are, in principle, available for capital projects in the tourism sector. The actual availability and terms of such support for individual countries and projects are subject to ECGD's normal underwriting criteria. This applies to the countries of eastern Europe, as it does to all other countries.

Car Imports

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the number of cars imported from *(a)* South Korea, *(b)* Malaysia, *(c)* Yugoslavia and *(d)* Czechoslovakia since 1986.

Mr. Sainsbury: The available information is given in the table.

United Kingdom Imports of Cars[1] (numbers)

	South Korea	*Malaysia*	*Yugoslavia*	*Czechoslovakia*
1986	5,353	47	8,549	13,173
1987	5,860	6	8,489	14,792
1988	9,292	20	9,061	12,580
1989	15,281	9,590	8,038	13,501
1990	4,690	11,605	5,045	2,477
1991[2]	9,827	11,436	1,250	4,664

[1] Cars are defined as items 781·0 and 782·1 of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC), Revision 2 for 1986 and 1987, and item 781 of SITC, Revision 3 for 1988 onwards.

[2] January–November

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries he has launched into potential insider dealing under section 177 of the Financial Services Act 1986 in each six-monthly period since April 1988.

Mr. Redwood: The number of investigations under section 177 of the Financial Services Act 1986 since April 1988 are as follows:

	Number
April 1988 to September 1988	6
October 1988 to March 1989	7
April 1989 to September 1989	9
October 1989 to March 1990	3
April 1990 to September 1990	3
October 1990 to March 1991	1
April 1991 to September 1991	1
October 1991 to date	1

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many prosecutions for insider dealing the stock exchange has instituted since it was given the powers to do so under the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood: There has been one prosecution by the stock exchange for insider dealing offences. Both defendants in the case were convicted.

Footwear Imports (Indonesia)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the value of footwear imports under the generalised system of preferences—GSP—scheme from Indonesia so far this year for *(a)* leather uppered footwear, *(b)* textile uppered footwear and *(c)* rubber and plastic uppered footwear.

Mr. Sainsbury: GSP import figures for these products from Indonesia, for the month of January 1992, are not yet available.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received from United Kingdom manufacturing industry about future business prospects.

Mr. Lilley: I have received the excellent report by the CBI's manufacturing advisory group which showed that recent years have seen a transformation in Britain's manufacturing base. United Kingdom-based manufacturers are well placed in some of the key growth markets of the future.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Royal Commonwealth Society Library

4. **Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government have taken to provide financial assistance to the Royal Commonwealth Society library.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I have been following closely the efforts of the Commonwealth Trust to safeguard the Royal Commonwealth Society library. The Government support these efforts which we understand show some prospect of succeeding. We have made it clear, however, that public funds will not be made available to help the Commonwealth Trust overcome its present financial difficulties.

Uruguay

14. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with Uruguay.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We enjoy close and friendly relations with Uruguay. During my recent visit to Montevideo I had wide-ranging and valuable discussions with President Lacalle and the Foreign Minister, Dr. Gros Espiell.

Croatia

22. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the criteria taken into account in determining whether a nation should be recognised; and how this policy was operated in relationship to Croatia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The criteria are that a country should have a clearly defined territory with a population; a Government with a prospect of retaining control; and independence in its foreign relations. These criteria are always subject to interpretation in the light of circumstances on the ground. In this case we and our EC partners recognised Croatia on the basis of advice from the arbitration commission that Croatia largely fulfilled the guidelines on recognition adopted last December. These were that the state to be recognised should respect the United Nations charter; guarantee the rights of minorities; respect the inviolability of frontiers except by peaceful agreement; accept commitments on disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, security and regional stability; and promise to settle by agreement questions of state-succession and regional disputes. We also took account of additional undertakings from the Croatian Government on minorities legislation.

Iran

23. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the human rights situation in Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We remain very concerned about the human rights situation in Iran. The reports of the United Nations special representative, Mr. Galindo Pohl, following his visits to Iran in 1990, contain ample evidence to justify these concerns. A further report, following his visit last December, is due to be presented to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. We shall study this report carefully together with the response made by the Iranian Government to the allegations contained in Mr. Pohl's earlier reports before deciding on further action.

Hong Kong

24. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit Hong Kong to discuss the future of the colony.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no present plans to make a further visit to Hong Kong. But my noble Friend Lord Caithness, Minister of State, hopes to visit the territory shortly.

32. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans discussions with the People's Republic of China on the future of Hong Kong.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It was agreed during the Prime Minister's visit to Peking in September 1991 that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs would meet the Chinese Foreign Minister at six-monthly intervals to discuss issues of mutual concern including Hong Kong. One purpose of these meetings will be to give added impetus to the detailed discussions on questions relating to the future of Hong Kong which takes place regularly in the Sino-British joint liaison group.

Spain

25. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the state of relations between the United Kingdom and Spain.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Relations between the United Kingdom and Spain are very good.

South Africa

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what future initiatives Her Majesty's Government intend to pursue to further sporting relationships with South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: I am glad that contacts with sport in South Africa are being restored, as sports there become racially integrated. We promoted this principle, on which there is now international consensus. Carrying it through is, and should be, a matter for the various sports bodies concerned.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Foreign and Commonwealth Office annual report is to be published this year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental report is to be published on 12 February.

Turkey

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last had discussions with the Turkish Government about the treatment of Kurdish people living inside Turkey.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I last discussed this issue at my meeting with the Turkish Foreign Minister on 20 December.

East Timor

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the consideration given by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to the situation in East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: East Timor is on the agenda of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. On 30 January I spoke to the commission in Geneva on the theme of accountability for human rights violations. Those who have broken the law in East Timor should be brought to account. We shall work closely with our EC partners on appropriate action in the commission.

36. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the situation in East Timor.

38. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he intends to make to the Government of Indonesia following the publication of the report of the inquiry into the massacre of civilians at Dili, East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 30 January, *Official Report*, column *651*.

Saudi Arabia

30. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet representatives of the Government of Saudi Arabia to discuss human rights issues.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Ministers and officials, including members of our embassy in Riyadh, discuss human rights issues with the Saudi Arabian authorities regularly. I have no plans to meet a representative of the Saudi Arabian Government in the near future.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he has made or plans to make to the Government of Saudi Arabia about infringements of human rights and religious freedom in that country.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Ministers and officials, including members of our embassy in Riyadh, regularly discuss human rights issues, including freedom of religion, with the Saudi Arabian authorities. I have no plans to meet a representative of the Saudi Arabian Government in the near future.

Baltic Republics

31. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the development of relations with the Baltic republics.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We intend to develop relations actively. We are giving practical help in consolidating their independence, building up democratic systems of government and rebuilding their economies. The bulk of our assistance is being directed through the European Community technical and emergency assistance programmes. We have also committed over £900,000 to projects through the know-how fund. We sponsored their United Nations membership applications. We pressed in the European Community for early trade and co-operation agreements: these are now being negotiated. We are supporting early IMF membership. Finally, we are resolving the Baltic gold question, in a prompt and effective manner which will give an important boost to the Baltic economies.

Commonwealth of Independent States

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on international assistance for the states of the former Soviet Union.

Mrs. Chalker: Assistance to the former Soviet Union committed in 1991 totals approximately $50 billion, of which the United Kingdom share is above $650 million. The top priority now is its translation into effective action on the ground. I am glad to say that our aid is indeed getting through.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he has received from the former Soviet republics on their willingness to meet their international obligations.

Mr. Hurd: Russia, as the continuation of the former Soviet Union, has accepted responsibility for the former union's international obligations. All the other former Soviet republics except Georgia have given assurances that they also will respect relevant international obligations of the former union.

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will represent the United Kingdom at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Prime Minister has indicated that he hopes to attend the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992. No decision has been taken on the composition of the rest of the British delegation.

EC Single Market

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards completion of the single market.

Mr. Garel-Jones: A total of 232 of the 282 measures in the Commission's 1985 single market White Paper have now been agreed. The United Kingdom, as presidency in the second half of this year, will have particular responsibility for bringing the single market programme to conclusion.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

37. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the numbers of British citizens who are ex-employees of BCCI who are still in Abu Dhabi and are being refused their passports.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are at present 10 former employees of BCCI who entered the United Arab Emirates on United Kingdom passports and whose passports are being retained by the UAE authorities. Eight of them are in detention pending the completion of investigations into the bank's affairs in Abu Dhabi. Two, who are not in detention, have outstanding liabilities to the bank. I understand that they are not seeking to leave the UAE and have not asked for the return of their passports from the authorities.

EC Foreign Policies

39. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next proposes to have discussions with his European Community partners concerning the development of common European Community foreign policies.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I meet my European Community partners regularly. The common foreign and security policy agreed at Maastricht will strengthen intergovernmental co-operation and joint action with our partners in agreed areas of policy.

Middle East

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for further discussion with EC Ministers with a view to encouraging peace talks in the middle east.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The middle east peace talks launched in Madrid are well under way. There have been three rounds of bilaterals: we expect a fourth to begin shortly. A useful meeting to organise multilateral talks took place in Moscow on 28 and 29 January. I shall review progress with my EC colleagues at our next meeting in Lisbon on 17 February.

Commonwealth Secretariat (Accounts)

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek publication of the accounts of the Commonwealth secretariat.

Mrs. Chalker: The accounts of the Commonwealth secretariat, as audited by the National Audit Office, are circulated to Commonwealth Governments. I am depositing a copy of the accounts for financial year 1989-90 in the Libraries of the House. The accounts for financial year 1990-91 will be available in June 1992.

The secretariat's financial year runs from 1 July.

Albania

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further progress has been made bilaterally and through the European Community in seeking to alleviate the plight of the Albanian people.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Overseas Development Administration has given £550,000 bilateral aid. The EC has contributed 52·5 mecu—£36·75 million—towards humanitarian food aid needs in Albania. The United Kingdom's contribution to this is £6·6 million.

China (Human Rights)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Chinese ambassador, in which he has raised cases of any individual political prisoners publicly named by Amnesty International, and in particular the case of Li Wei, currently detained in Lingyuan prison; and what general representations he has made to China about human rights.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Chinese ambassador is reminded regularly by Ministers and officials in the Foreign Office of our concern about human rights in China. Mr. Li Wei was among five detained workers from the Changchun automobile plant whose cases were included in the list left with the Chinese Government during the Prime Minister's visit to Peking in September. An updated list, compiled again in conjunction with Amnesty International, was handed over during the Prime Minister's talks with Premier Li Peng in New York last week. We and our EC colleagues maintain a constant watch on human rights issues in China, with regular representations to the Chinese Government.

Mr. Yasser Arafat

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the purpose of the meeting between Her Majesty's ambassador in Tunis and Mr. Yasser Arafat, on 26 January, and whether the ambassador gave any recognition in the meeting to Mr. Arafat's claimed capacity as President of the state of Palestine.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We maintain a dialogue with the PLO on the middle east peace process at official level. Her Majesty's ambassador at Tunis has had a number of meetings with Mr. Arafat in this context. The latest of these was on 25 January. The United Kingdom does not recognise the so-called state of Palestine and therefore the question of recognising its "President" does not arise.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those states which *(a)* have signed and ratified the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, *(b)* have acceded to the treaty but not yet completed a full safeguards agreement, pursuant to article III of the treaty, *(c)* have signed and ratified the treaty but are known to have breached any article of the treaty through non-compliance and *(d)* have indicated an intention to sign the treaty but have not yet done so.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: *(a)* (i) The Following countries have signed and ratified the NPT.

United Kingdom
Russian Federation
United States of America
Afghanistan
Austria
Australasia
Barbados
Belgium
Benin
Bolivia
Botswana
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Cameroon
Canada
Chad
Colombia
Costa Rica
Cyprus
Czechoslovakia
Denmark
Dominican Republic
Equador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
Gambia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Hungary
Iceland
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Ireland
Italy
Jamaica

Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Republic of Korea
Kuwait
Laos
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia
Libya
Luxembourg
Madagascar
Malaysia
Maldives
Mali
Malta
Mauritius
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Nigeria
Norway
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Ivory Coast
Romania
San Marino
Senegal
Singapore
Somalia
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Syria
Poland
Taiwan
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Uruguay
Venezuela
Vietnam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zaire

(ii) the following countries have either acceded or succeeded to the NPT:

Albania
Antigua and Barbuda
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Belize
Bhutan
Brunei
Burundi
Cambodia
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Congo
Dominica
Equatorial Guinea
Estonia
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Holy See
Kiribati
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Latvia
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Malawi
Mozambique
Nauru
Qatar
Papua New Guinea
Portugal
Rwanda
Fiji
Gabon
Grenada
Sierra Leone
Solomon Islands
South Africa
Spain
St. Lucia
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Suriname
Sao Tome and Principe
Saudi Arabia
Seychelles
Tanzania
Thailand
Tonga
Tuvalu
Uganda
Western Samoa
Zambia
Zimbabwe

(b) The following are parties to the treaty but have not yet completed a full-scope safeguards agreement:

Antigua and Barbuda
Bahamas
Bahrain
Benin
Bolivia
Botswana
Barbados
Belize
Cambodia
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
Congo
Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea
Grenada
Guinea-Bissau
Haiti
Kenya
Kuwait
Laos
Latvia
Liberia
Lithuania
Malawi
Mali
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Mozambique
Qatar
Rwanda
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Dominica
Equatorial Guinea
Estonia
Gabon
Sierra Leone
Solomon Islands
Somalia
Syria
Tanzania
Togo
San Marino
Sao Tome and Principe
Saudi Arabia
Seychelles
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Uganda

Yemen
Zambia
Zimbabwe

(b) Iraq's proven endeavours to develop a nuclear weapon programme was a flagrant breach of its obligations under the NPT. The failure of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to sign and implement its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency is also a breach of its obligations under the NPT. However, we welcome the recent signature of this agreement and look forward to its early ratification and implementation.

All those listed in B except Mozambique, Albania, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia are in technical breach of their obligation to sign a safeguards agreement with the IAEA within 18 months of depositing their instrument of accession. However, this is of no practical significance as none of the states in question possesses nuclear materials requiring safeguards.

(d) The following states have indicated an intention to accede to the treaty, but have not yet done so:

1. France
2. China
3. Ukraine
4. Belarus
5. Kazakhstan
6. Uzbekistan
7. Turkimenistan
8. Azerbaijan
9. Kirgizstan
10. Tajikistan
11. Armenia
12. Moldova

North Korea

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, columns *103-4*, what information he has about the design on which the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has constructed a plutonium production nuclear plant.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As far as we are aware, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has not made public any information about the design of this facility.

Human Rights

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part Her Majesty's Government are playing in the international fora for the promotion of human rights.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Her Majesty's Government has consistently played a full and active role in international human rights fora. The United Kingdom was re-elected to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights this year. I paid a visit to the Commission in Geneva on 29 and 30 January. In my speech I reaffirmed the British Government's commitment to the universal promotion of human rights and announced a £25,000 contribution to the United Nations voluntary fund on torture.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community's Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 3 February. It will consider the next stages on the European economic area in the light of discussions between the Commission and the European Free Trade Association over how to resolve the problems resulting from the European Court of Justice opinion. The Council will discuss follow-up to the Washington conference on aid to the former Soviet Union, and consider ways to develop the Community's relations with the former republics. The Council will discuss whether trade and co-operation agreements should be negotiated with Brazil and the Andean pact. A European Community trade and co-operation agreement with Paraguay will be signed in the margins. The Council will also consider policy towards Haiti following the coup. The Council will also discuss conciliation procedures on Asia/Latin America and European Community investment partners with a delegation from the European Parliament. The Commission will make a presentation on export controls on dual use goods.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 10 February. Ministers will consider multilateral surveillance of the economies of member states, including the Irish convergence programme, and also the formal adoption of the Commission's annual economic report. The Council will also consider aid to central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Council may also consider the revision to the financial perspective for 1992, the investment services directive; and the legislative programme relating to economic and monetary union arising from the treaty on European union. Ministers may also formally adopt the legal text of the draft directive on the commercial movement of excise goods in the single market which they agreed at the Economic and Finance Council on 16 December 1991. It is also expected that Ministers will formally adopt a new regulation for enhanced administrative cooperation between member states. This will provide for the automatic exchange of information between EC tax authorities.

The Agriculture Council will meet on 10 and 11 February. Ministers will discuss reform of the common agricultural policy, agricultural aspects of the GATT Uruguay round, public health problems affecting the killing of wild game and the marketing of wild game meat.

The Internal Market Council will meet on 25 February. Ministers may consider the final adoption of the public procurement directive for remedies in the utilities sectors, and the adoption of common positions on the third non-life insurance directive. Consolidation directives on tractors and on units of measurement, and a directive on veterinary homeopathic medicines will also be discussed by Ministers. There may also be further ministerial discussions on frontier controls, and draft legislation on data protection, precursor chemicals, food colourings and food irradiation.

Antarctica

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the abandoned British bases in Antarctica, stating for each what plans he has to ensure that they do not despoil the Antarctic environment.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

Stations and field huts abandoned since 1947 by the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey or its successor, the British Antarctic Survey—BAS—are:

South Orkney Islands:
Cape Geddes

South Shetland Islands:
Admiralty Bay
Deception Island

Trinity Peninsula:
Hope Bay
View Point

Antarctic Peninsula:
Portal Point
Danco Island
Port Lockroy
Anvers Island
Prospect Point
Detaille Island
Orford Cliff
Stonington Island

Brunt Ice Shelf:
Halley Bases I-IV

Each of these bases has been visited by an inspection party to assess the work required, with the exception of Halley I and Halley II, which are now buried and inaccessible. The sites will be maintained, removed, or, in a limited number of cases, maintained as historical monuments, and the survey is now drawing up a programme to undertake the necessary work.

Remedial work has already been undertaken as follows:

Deception Island—Clean up work in 1990-91 and 1991-92, with removal of waste and fuel oil.

Halley III—Clean-up work and removal of waste in 1990-91, before the base became too unsafe for access.

Anvers Island—Removal of the base, except for the foundations, by a United States group on behalf of BAS.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Manor House Residential Home

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to increase the physiotherapy service to patients at Manor House residential home in Rathfriland, County Down.

Mr. Hanley: The management and delivery of services in Rathfriland is the responsibility of Southern health and social services board. The hon. Gentleman may wish to contact the chairman of the board Mr. J. Daniel Thompson DL.

Health Board Management Units

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what are the current waiting times for speech therapy appointments in each of the units of management of each health board in Northern Ireland;

(2) what are the current waiting times in respect of chiropody care in each unit of management in each health board in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Gentleman may wish to contact the chairmen of the four health and social services boards.

Speech Therapy

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many speech therapists are employed in each unit of management of each health board in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Details of the number of speech therapists employed in each unit of management of each health and social services board at 30 September 1991, the latest date available, are as follows:

Health and Social Services Board and unit of management	*Numbers employed*	*Whole time equivalent*
Eastern Board		
Belfast City Hospital Unit	6	6·00
Down and Lisburn Unit	15	13·83
Green Park Unit	10	9·53
Mater Infirmorum Hospital Unit	1	1·00
North and West Belfast Community Unit	13	12·01
North Down and Ards Community Unit	11	8·98
Royal Group of Hospitals Unit	3	3·00
South and East Belfast Community Unit	24	20·30
Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospitals Unit	6	4·50
Total	89	79·15
Northern Board		
Antrim Hospital Unit	—	—
Bannside Unit	15	13·07
Causeway Unit	10	7·97
Loughside Unit	10	8·99
Total	35	29·98
Southern Board		
Area Mental Health Unit	—	—
Armagh and Dungannon Unit	8	8·00
Craigavon and Banbridge Community Unit	6	6·00
Craigavon Area Hospital Unit	—	—
Newry and Mourne Unit	6	6·00
Total	20	20·00
Western Board		
Altnagelvin Group of Hospitals Unit	—	—
Area Mental Health Unit	—	—
Foyle Community Unit	6	6·00
Omagh and Fermanagh Hospital and Community Unit	12	10·24
Total	18	16·24
Northern Ireland Total	129	118·71

Chiropody

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many chiropodists are employed in each unit of management of each of the health boards in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Details of the number of chiropodists employed in each unit of management of each health and social services board at 30 September 1991, the latest date available, are as follows:

Health and Social Services Board and Unit of Management	*Numbers employed*	*Whole time equivalent*
EASTERN BOARD		
Belfast City Hospital Unit	1	1·00
Down and Lisburn Unit	10	9·12
Green Park Unit	1	0·66
Mater Infirmorum Hospital Unit	—	—
North and West Belfast Community Unit	10	10·00
North Down and Ards Community Unit	10	9·55
Royal Group of Hospitals Unit	1	1·00
South and East Belfast Community Unit	22	20·16
Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospitals Unit	1	1·00
Total	56	52·49
NORTHERN BOARD		
Antrim Hospital Unit	—	—
Bannside Unit	13	12·00
Causeway Unit	11	8·70
Loughside Unit	21	18·35
Total	45	39·05
SOUTHERN BOARD		
Area Mental Health Unit	—	—
Armagh and Dungannon Unit	10	9·08
Craigavon and Banbridge Community Unit	10	9·09
Craigavon Area Hospital Unit	—	—
Newry and Mourne Unit	6	5·00
Total	26	23·17
WESTERN BOARD		
Altnagelvin Group of Hospitals Unit	—	—
Area Mental Health Unit	—	—
Foyle Community Unit	14	14·00
Omagh and Fermanagh Hospital and Community Unit	11	10·80
Total	25	24·80
Northern Ireland Total	185	166·17

Home Help Service

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people have to pay for home help service in the Down section of the Down and Lisburn unit of management.

(2) how many people had home help service withdrawn in the Down section of the Down and Lisburn unit of management in each of the years since 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1991 and from 1 April 1991 to 31 December 1991, respectively.

Mr. Hanley: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Gentleman may wish to contact the chairman of the Eastern health and social services board, Mr. Norman Fergusson, CBE.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are in receipt of free home help service in each of the units of management of each health board in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: This information is not collected centrally. The hon. Gentleman may wish to contact the chairman of the four health and social services boards.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements for transfer of dowry funds with resettled mental handicap patients to local authorities have been made in each regional health authority; under what terms these payments are made; and if he will list by regional health authority the sums transferred each year on this basis.

Mr. Hanley: The principle of dowry transfer to local authorities does not apply in Northern Ireland because of the integrated nature of the provision of health and personal social services.

HEALTH

Pulmonary Tuberculosis

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for each region the number of deaths from pulmonary tuberculosis for each month of the last two years.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest available information is given in the tables.

Deaths (underlying cause) from pulmonary tuberculosis (ICD 011), for England, Wales and elsewhere and for each RHA separately: and for each month of 1989.

1989

Regional Health Authority	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*
England, Wales and Else[1]	23	31	25	37	37	20	23	17	24	29	20	40
England	22	30	24	35	32	20	22	16	20	26	18	34
Wales	1	1	1	2	5	—	—	1	4	3	2	3
Else[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	3
Northern	1	3	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	—	2	3
Yorkshire	1	2	2	2	3	1	2	1	1	—	1	2
Trent	2	6	1	3	5	—	3	—	2	2	2	5
East Anglian	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	1	—	2	—	—
North West Thames	2	2	4	3	—	2	1	—	2	2	1	6
North East Thames	2	3	2	3	3	6	3	2	3	3	2	5
South East Thames	2	—	6	4	4	1	1	3	5	2	2	3
South West Thames	2	1	—	1	2	1	1	—	2	2	—	1
Wessex	1	1	1	2	—	—	2	1	—	—	—	2
Oxford	1	1	1	1	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	3
South Western	3	3	—	1	2	1	—	—	1	3	—	—

Regional Health Authority	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	Augus tSep-tember	October	November	December	
West Midlands	1	5	3	7	3	3	4	2	2	6	3	1
Mersey	2	1	2	3	3	1	2	3	—	1	1	2
North Western	1	2	1	1	4	1	1	2	1	3	4	i
Wales	1	1	1	2	5	—	—	1	4	3	2	3

[1] Else (Elsewhere) are those deaths registered in England and Wales to individuals not normally resident.

Deaths (underlying cause) from pulmonary tuberculosis (ICD 011) for England, Wales and elsewhere, and for each regional health authority separately; and for each month of 1990

RHA	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
England, Wales and elsewhere[1]	30	38	27	34	20	15	26	26	16	21	28	33
England	23	37	20	30	19	15	25	25	15	19	26	28
Wales	7	1	7	4	1	—	—	1	1	2	2	4
Elsewhere[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Northern	3	3	1	1	—	—	2	1	1	2	4	1
Yorkshire	—	1	2	3	—	1	2	1	—	—	2	—
Trent	3	3	3	3	3	1	5	2	3	3	3	4
East Anglian	—	3	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
North West Thames	3	3	1	2	—	2	2	1	3	2	4	3
North East Thames	2	6	3	2	2	—	3	1	—	1	1	3
South East Thames	1	5	1	6	3	2	1	—	2	1	3	1
South West Thames	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	4	1	2	1	3
Wessex	—	1	1	2	—	1	1	—	1	—	2	2
Oxford	—	1	1	—	—	2	1	1	—	1	1	—
South Western	2	3	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	2	1	2
West Midlands	6	4	5	4	1	3	2	8	3	4	1	3
Mersey	—	1	—	—	2	—	1	2	—	—	1	3
North Western	2	1	1	4	6	2	4	3	—	1	1	3
Wales	7	1	7	4	1	—	—	1	1	2	2	4

[1] Elsewhere are those deaths registered in England and Wales to individuals not normally resident.

Deaths (underlying cause) from pulmonary tuberculosis (ICD 011), for England, Wales and elsewhere, and for each RHA separately; and for each month of 1991 for which there are data available (January-September).

1991

RHA	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September
England, Wales and Else[1]	46	30	30	29	22	23	19	30	21
England	45	23	27	24	19	22	19	29	18
Wales	1	6	2	4	3	1	—	1	3
Else[1]	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Northern	5	2	1	—	—	2	1	2	1
Yorkshire	3	2	3	1	2	2	1	1	1
Trent	5	2	1	4	1	2	3	3	2
East Anglian	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
North West Thames	3	4	—	1	4	3	2	2	3
North East Thames	3	4	4	2	2	2	—	[illegible]	1
South East Thames	2	2	2	3	1	1	2	2	2
South West Thames	1	1	3	—	—	1	4	2	1
Wessex	2	2	1	1	3	1	—	4	1
Oxford	2	—	3	1	—	1	1	1	2
South Western	2	—	1	1	—	2	—	1	—
West Midlands	8	4	3	6	3	1	3	3	2
Mersey	3	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	—
North Western	6	—	4	2	3	4	2	2	2
Wales	1	6	2	4	3	1	—	1	3

[1] Else (Elsewhere) are those deaths registered in England and Wales to individuals not normally resident.

Psychopathic Persons

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration is being given to amending the Mental Health Act 1983 to enable psychopathic persons, though deemed untreatable, to be admitted to mental hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: The needs of people suffering from psychopathic disorder, and how they can best be met both in the prison service and in the health and social care system, are one of the issues being considered by the joint Department of Health/Home Office review of services for mentally disordered offenders. We shall be considering very carefully the conclusions reached by the review and any questions they raise about possible changes in the present law.

National Health Service (Salaries)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the national health service, and at which grades, earn more than £20,280 a year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At least 70,000 people working in the NHS in England, and in the categories listed below are estimated to have basic earnings greater than £20,280 per annum. An additional and significant number in most of those categories have gross earnings in excess of £20,280, because they receive additional payments such as overtime and allowances. Review body awards as well as pay settlements due on 1 April will further increase the numbers earning more than £20,280.

Groups containing people whose earnings in the NHS exceed £20,280 per annum:

Administrative and Clerical
Ambulance Officers
Community Medical and Dental Staff
Hospital Medical and Dental Staff
Nursing and Midwifery Staff
Professions Allied to Medicine
Scientific and Professional Staff
Professional and Technical Staff
General/Senior Managers
General Medical Practitioners
General Dental Practitioners

Criminal Justice Act 1991

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *108*, he will state the timetable for the action plan on the implementation of Social Service Department involvement in the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The juvenile remands national steering group intends to complete its work as quickly as possible and to produce an action plan no later than October.

Patients Charter

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he intends to take if any of the charter standards and patient rights are not met by any unit of the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: The patients charter gives the individual patient the right to have any complaint about denial of charter rights investigated by the chief executive of the NHS, who will take any necessary remedial action. Health authorities will have to publish information about their performance against national and local standards annually. Performance against standards will be a key feature in the NHS performance review process.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many sales of capital assets have arisen from closures of mental handicap hospitals; and if he will list the assets disposed of and the money raised by each sale.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not available centrally.

Oral Health

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the consultative document on oral health strategy; what opportunities there will be for representations by interested parties; and if he intends to establish external consultative committees.

Mr. Dorrell: Once the final version of the consultative document is completed a firm date for publication can be set. It is expected that this will be within the next few months. When the document is issued, there will be an opportunity for all interested parties to make representations. It may then be considered appropriate to establish a consultative committee.

Pharmaceuticals (Price Regulations)

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current turnover threshold below which companies who participate in the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme are exempt from the requirement to submit detailed accounts and price structure analyses to his Department; when that figure was fixed; what plans he has to raise the threshold; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS) is a voluntary agreement between the Government and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI). It applies to all companies supplying branded medicines to the National Health Service which are prescribed by medical or dental practitioners.

Under the terms of the agreement, companies with annual sales to the NHS of over £4 million are asked to supply the full details required by the annual financial returns specified in the scheme. Companies with annual sales to the NHS of between £500,000 and £4 million are asked to provide copies of their audited accounts and of a statement giving a breakdown of turnover between NHS sales, export sales of NHS medicines and other sales, plus details of sales promotion costs. Companies with annual sales to the NHS not exceeding £500,000 are exempt from supplying financial information except when specifically called for.

These threshold levels were established when the current PPRS was agreed with the ABPI in 1986. The scheme runs until 1 October 1992, but will continue beyond that if neither party gives due notice of termination. The Government are therefore now considering whether any changes to the current scheme are needed. The possibility of raising thresholds is one of the points which could be discussed with the ABPI.

Departmental Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long each computerised system in his Department would take to return to full operation in the event of a disaster.

Mr. Dorrell: Each IT system in the Department contains elements designed to reduce the likelihood of a disaster and minimise the impact of any disaster that may occur. Recovery time would depend on the severity of the breakdown.

Physiotherapists

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which departments or other authorities have responsibility for the education and training of state registered physiotherapists to meet the needs of non-NHS employers and of the public for independent practitioners; what arrangements exist for the co-ordination of these needs with those of the NHS; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Education and training for state registered physiotherapists is provided at both further education and NHS institutions. Regional health authorities purchase the majority of places available and also provide bursaries to physiotherapy students. In determining how many places to purchase they consult locally with public, private and voluntary sector interests so as to assess and meet overall demand.

Caring for Children

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will issue guidance to local authorities on the implementation of the Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations 1991;

(2) if the guidance contained in Home Office circular 88(102) is superseded by the Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations 1991;

(3) if he will make a statement on his plans for publicising the Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations 1991;

(4) if he will extend the principles concerning the schedule of offences established in the Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations 1991 to the vetting of *(a)* applicants for social work employment and social work students seeking placements, *(b)* applicants to work in childrens homes and *(c)* potential foster parents.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Guidance on the implementations of the Disqualification for the Caring for Children Regulations 1991 is contained in volume 8 of the Children Act Regulations and Guidance series, which also reproduces the text of the regulations. Copies of volume 8 were distributed to local authorities, voluntary organisations and others with an interest on 15 October 1991.

The Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations apply to applicants who wish to work in registered childrens homes or voluntary homes or as private foster parents, child minders or providers of day care. Local authorities have discretion under the Children Act to lift a disqualification, although the guidance in volume 8 is that this should be done only in the most exceptional circumstances.

Although the regulations do not apply to the local authority sector, the guidance in volume 8 advises that local authorities should have regard to the regulations when considering the appointment of staff to any services which are run by the local authority and when assessing people's suitability to work as childminders or foster parents employed by a local authority. Volumes 2 ("Family Support, Day Care and Educational Provision for Young Children"), 3 ("Family Placements") and 4 ("Residential Care") in the Children Act series contain clear guidance on the necessity for local authorities to undertake a thorough assessment of the suitability of people who wish to work with children in any services run by the local authority. These provisions ensure that equivalent measures exist for safeguarding the welfare of children care for in such services as in any in the private and voluntary sectors.

The guidance in Home Office circular 88(102) is not superseded by the Disqualification for Caring for Children Regulations 1991 and continues to apply to local authorities in addition to the Children Act guidance in volumes 2, 3 and 4.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Resettlement Units

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many places are currently available in resettlement units throughout the United Kingdom, showing the location of each unit and the number of places in each unit;

(2) what sums have been allocated in his Departmental budget to provide resettlement unit places; and what plans he has made for the next three years;

(3) what research has been undertaken to investigate the need for places in resettlement units.

Miss Widdecombe: The management of the Resettlement Agency is a matter for Mr. Tony Ward, the chief executive. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement outlining Her Majesty's Government's current plans for those remaining resettlement units in terms of the duty imposed on him under the Social Security Act 1980.

Miss Widdecombe: Under the plans announced in 1985 we will have replaced eight resettlement units with better alternative facilities by March 1993. These units include most of those whose physical condition was the poorest.

We have now decided that the best way forward is to work towards the transfer of most of the remaining hostels directly to voluntary organisations and others who have skills and experience in caring for single homeless people.

The Resettlement Agency which is now responsible for running the units therefore intends to invite suitable organisations with the appropriate skills to tender for these, starting with the hostels at Newbury and Camden. The agency will continue to provide funding to organisations that take over the running of transferred units. If any savings are produced by this revised strategy they will be recycled to fund further replacement provision. The tendering process will also encourage outside organisations to make positive proposals for re-employing resettlement unit staff.

We believe that this approach is the best way to secure improved service to unsettled homeless people quickly, avoids the loss of local service and offers the best all-round value for money. By a combination of transfer and replacement the Resettlement Agency is now looking to complete its task of securing replacement providers within five years.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state what progress has been made since April 1991 with the Welsh language implementation programme, established in his Department in Wales; what specific changes of policy in his Department on this issue have taken place during 1991; and if he is satisfied with the progress that has so far been made.

Miss Widdecombe: The use of the Welsh language in the administration of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Benefit Deductions

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the estimated administrative cost to his Department of making deductions from income support for community charge arrears;

(2) what are the administrative costs of making deductions from income support payments to meet claimants' debts.

Miss Widdecombe: The resourcing of this work is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Disability Appeal Tribunals (Membership)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what representations he has received concerning social security regulations affecting disabled people who became panel members on disability appeal tribunals;

(2) what are his plans to amend the regulations on earnings and incapacity to permit disabled claimants who sit on disability appeal tribunals to perform their duties without incurring loss or reduction of benefit.

Mr. Scott: We have received a number of representations on this issue. We are committed to making sure that people with disabilities play an active role in the assessment and adjudication process of disability living allowance, attendance allowance and disability working allowance. This includes ensuring that as many disability appeal tribunals as possible include a disabled person in their membership. We are currently considering whether the benefit rules are acting as barrier to the independent tribunal service recruiting disabled people as disability appeal tribunal members. I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Income Support

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants with a disabled child on *(a)* income support and *(b)* housing benefit had their benefit reduced as a result of the presence of non-dependants in the household.

Miss Widdecombe: Information is not available in the form requested. The available information is based on the annual 1 per cent. sample surveys and, with the small numbers involved in the groups concerned, precise figures cannot be given. However, it is estimated that the total number would be less than 1,000.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support claimants had deductions from their benefit during 1991 for *(a)* social fund loan repayment, *(b)* community charge arrears, *(c)* rent arrears, *(d)* mortgage arrears, *(e)* water charges and *(f)* fuel debts; and how many of these claimants received a disability premium.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest information available is contained in table 10.2 of the annual statistical inquiry for May 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Part-ownership Schemes

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total cost to date of setting up, publicising and administering the flexi-ownership or rents into mortgage schemes in Scotland; and how many tenants have so far acquired part-ownership of their homes under this scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 February 1992]*: Since the introduction of the pilot rent-to-mortgage scheme, the cost of setting up, publicising and administering the scheme is estimated at around £788,000. A total of 264 sales had been completed by the end of 1991, resulting in additional receipts of £2,467,000. Tenants purchasing under the scheme become owners with full title to the property from the completion of the sale.

Nursery Places

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many places in nursery schools and classes were provided by education authorities in 1990-91 and 1991-92 in Scotland; how many of these places were *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time; and what was the total number of full-time equivalent places provided.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 4 February 1992]*: Information on the number of full-time, part-time and full-time equivalent pupils attending education authority nursery schools and departments in Scotland at September 1990 and 1991 is as follows:

	Full-time pupils	*Part-time pupils*	*Total Number*	*Pupils Full-time equivalent*
1990	2,927	41,054	43,981	22,907·6
[1]1991	3,024	42,322	45,346	23,551·4

[1] Provisional.

Some nursery pupil rolls reach higher levels after September. In session 1990-91 peak rolls were 7·4 per cent. above the total number of pupils attending at September 1990; for session 1991-92 peak rolls are anticipated to be 9·4 per cent. above the September 1991 level.

Primary School Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to date of the introduction of national testing into Scottish primary schools.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 4 February 1992]*: The Government have incurred expenditure in the writing and vetting of test units, printing and distribution to schools, moderation of the pilot round, the cost of running the primary assessment unit, and of the preparation, issue and promotion of an information leaflet on testing which totals £1·16 million.

DEFENCE

Hunt Transport

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what elements of the costs of transporting horses and riders to hunting meets can readily be identified.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The cost of buying and maintaining horse boxes and the cost of fuel is identifiable, but is not met from public funds.

Nuclear Testing

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received from the United States Department of Energy, as manager of the Nevada nuclear test site, regarding representations made about British nuclear testing at the Nevada test site during its public hearing hosted by the United States Department of Energy on 14 November 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 February 1992

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Peru

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss human rights in Peru when he meets President Fujimori of Peru on 5 February.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My discussions with President Fujimori covered a wide range of issues of common interest, including human rights.

Soviet Union (Members' Visits)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of hon. Members to whom his Department has afforded a briefing in advance of visits to the former Soviet Union since 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We do not hold this information. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has given briefing to a very large number of hon. Members visiting the former Soviet Union over the past 13 years, and of course stands ready to do so in the future.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes he proposes to make in his Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running costs limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made: The cash limit for class II, vote 1 (overseas representation) will be increased by £8,209,000 from £629,076,000 to £637,285,000. The running costs limit on vote 1 will be decreased by £1,781,000 from £480,647,000 to £487,866,000. These changes take account of increased local staff salaries overseas and the adverse effect of overseas price movements which are partially offset by reduced running costs on the home estate, local budgets and information services.

The cash limit for class II, vote 2 (other external relations) will be increased by £27,939,000 from £165,431,000 to £193,370,000. This change takes account of expenditure on Vietnamese boat people; international peacekeeping operations in Yugoslavia and Cambodia; the United Nations Angola verification mission; a grant-in-aid towards the Westminster Foundation for Democracy; a payment to the Iranian Government under the United Kingdom/Iran compensation agreement and higher than forecast expenditure on United Kingdom contributions to international organisations due to the adverse effect of overseas price movements.

The cash limit for class II, vote 4 (The British Council) will be increased by £463,000 from £89,944,000 to £90,407,000 to take account of the adverse effect of overseas price movements.

These increases will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRANSPORT

Cash and Running Costs Limits

28. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to make to the cash limits and running costs limits for his Department.

Mr. Rifkind: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

Class and Vote	*Current cash limit*	*Changes*	*Revised cash limit*
VII, 1	1,953,664,000	[1] −21,435,000	1,932,229,000
2	234,438,000	[2] 3,176,000	237,614,000
4	148,254,000	8,660,000	156,914,000
5	349,585,000	[3] 7,600,000	357,185,000

[1] Transfers of £2,835,000 for research and development to class VII, vote 2, £8,850,000 for the Black Country spine road to class VIII, vote 3, £8,660,000 to class VII, vote 4 in respect of reduced appropriations in aid. There is a further reduction of £1,090,000 as a result of the demand financing arrangements for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

[2] An increase of £451,000 for railways inspectorate service from Department of Employment (class VI, vote 3). There is also a reduction of £110,000 in the running costs on this vote.

[3] It was announced on 1 July 1991 (*Official Report* column 6) that I would seek to introduce at an early opportunity legislation to write off or suspend those parts of the debt of the Humber Bridge Board that cannot be financed from the board's revenues. The board's borrowings are from the Public Works Loan Commissioners and from my Department. Until powers to write off or suspend debt are available, it would be inappropriate for further loans to be made by my Department to the board as there is no reasonable expectation of those loans being properly serviced and repaid and I understand that the Public Works Loan Commissioners have also decided that it would be inappropriate to make further advances to the board. To enable the board to meet its commitments I propose to make grants to it amounting to £7,600,000. These grants will be made on the sole authority of the estimate and the subsequent Appropriation Act.

My Department's running costs limit has been reduced by £110,000 from £378,984,000 to £378,874,000.

The changes described will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Airports

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made in installing a permanent noise and track keeping system at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am delighted that my noble Friend has announced in another place that BAA has now committed itself to purchasing a system that should be installed by early autumn. The system will be one of the most modern in the world, and will have considerable flexibility in the ways it can be used. It will be used to enforce noise and track requirements and also to provide a lot more information about the performance of aircraft and their impact on surrounding communities.

The noise monitoring will be carried out by a total of 36 noise monitors. There will be 12 fixed noise monitors in total at the three airports, primarily to monitor noise against predetermined limits, and 24 mobile monitors that can be deployed to collect data on aircraft noise from any area near the airports. The monitors will be able to record the noise made by individual aircraft and will also be able to store data so that they can be analysed in a variety of ways. This will enable a review of noise limits to be carried out at the three airports with a view to introducing tougher limits more appropriate to modern aircraft. The noise monitoring installation should be completed by the early summer.

The track monitoring will require provision of radar data feed to the system. I understand that this should be available so as to allow installation of the track monitoring by early autumn. Again, the system will be able to identify the tracks followed by individual aircraft as well as to allow analysis of track data in different ways. This will be used to improve the accuracy with which aircraft follow noise preferential routes from the airports.

I am pleased to report that BAA is keen to involve local people through the local airport consultative committees in considering how best to use the system. It has great potential for ensuring that aircraft are operated in a way that minimises noise nuisance for surrounding communities. But the most effective use of the system will be developed only with experience: the contribution from local people and from the airlines to that development will be invaluable.

Holborn Station

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the safety improvements promised for Holborn station to be carried out.

Mr. Freeman: The timing of particular underground schemes is a matter for London Underground Limited.

Bow Trader

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what inquiry will be undertaken by his Department into the events which led to the Bow Trader colliding with two bridges on the Thames on the night of 31 January;

(2) if he will ask Mr. John Hayes, the head of the independent inquiry into river safety, to consider the collision of Friday 31 January of the Bow Trader into two bridges on the River Thames.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department's Marine Accident Investigation Branch is involved with the Port of London Authority in an investigation into the incident. The MAIB will provide Mr. John Hayes with early advice on the initial findings of the investigation.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the minimum manning level for a dredger such as the Bow Trader, operating on the River Thames at night.

Mr. McLoughlin: The minimum manning level of United Kingdom-registered ships is assessed on an individual basis. In the case of the Bow Trader the minimum number of crew would be eight. The composition of the watch when operating on the River Thames at night should not be less than one qualified officer on the bridge, a helmsman, a lookout and an engineer.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the level of manning on the Bow Trader on the night of 31 January; whether lookouts were maintained in compliance with his Department's standards; and if they were equipped with two way radios.

Mr. McLoughlin: These matters will be addressed during the investigation.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the initiatives taken by his Department to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and indicate the estimated reduction for each initiative by *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2005.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment gave earlier today.

Dock Labour Scheme

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *501*, if he will give details of any provision by which third parties affected by the abolition of the dock labour scheme may seek redress.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Dock Work Act 1989 made no provision in respect of creditors and non-docker employees of stevedoring firms, since their rights, in the event of a liquidation, were already governed respectively by the general legislation on insolvencies and employment protection.

Marine Accident Report

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the recommendations made by the marine accident investigation branch in the Marchioness/Bowbelle report have been fully implemented; and if he will list those recommendations which remain to be implemented, and the target implementation date.

Mr. McLoughlin: The 27 recommendations in the marine accident investigation branch report were published, separately from the report, in July 1990. The Secretary of State for Transport immediately accepted them all. So far 20 recommendations have been fully implemented.

Of those outstanding, five are to be the subject of regulations, and, as required by the Merchant Shipping Act 1979, consultative documents have been circulated for public comment. It is planned that sets of regulations, based on three recommendations will be in force by this summer. The recommendations to be covered by these regulations will be:

No. 5—minimum standards of visibility on passenger launches;
No. 15—boatman's licence to be given statutory status;
No. 17—hours of work on river craft.

It is planned that sets of regulations, based on two recommendations, will be in force by this autumn. The recommendations to be covered by these regulations will be:

No. 20—a review of standards of stability and construction on passenger launches;
No. 24—a review of life saving appliance requirements on passenger launches.

In respect of action on recommendation No. 4—to enforce existing guidelines on navigational bridge visibility on sea going ships—the United Kingdom made a submission to the 17th assembly of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in 1991, and will be making a submission to the IMO's Maritime Safety Committee during 1992, with a view to the mandatory adoption of the guidelines internationally. Arrangements enabling all relevant United Kingdom ships currently operational to comply with this recommendation should be completed by the end of this month.

Responsibility for recommendation No. 19—a traffic signalling system on the River Thames—lies with the Port of London Authority (PLA). A system of radio-controlled warning lights has been developed by the PLA for 19 London bridges. Commissioning of the lights will take place on 15 February. It is anticipated that there will be a commissioning period of one month prior to final acceptance by the PLA.

Provisional Driving Licences (Application Forms)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will include on the application form for a provisional driving licence a notice informing applicants that they may receive direct mail from private organisations; and if he will provide for applicants for provisional driving licences to opt out of the receipt of direct mail consequent on their completion of the form.

Mr. Chope: Further consideration is being given to the use of DVLA's database for commercial purposes. The concerns of individuals receiving third party mail has been recognised and any decision will take account of this and of the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

Driving Licences

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning the inclusion of photographs on driving licences; whether the photograph will be digitised and sent to the police national computer; and whether the photograph will be used for official or unofficial identification purposes.

Mr. Christopher Chope: The DVLA is undertaking a feasibility study to determine how best to proceed with the initiative of including photographs on driving licences. Several strategic and administrative issues are being addressed including the technology available, costs and the data protection implications. The DVLA will seek the advice of the data protection registrar.

Police have access to the driver licensing records for law enforcement purposes under the terms of the Road Traffic Act 1988. Schedule 34(5)a of the Data Protection Act 1984 removes any data protection restriction on such statutory disclosure. If photographs of drivers were to form part of those records, then the police will have access to them under the same terms, subject to consultation with the data protection registrar.

A driving licence is a document which indicates an individual's entitlement to drive. It is not, nor is it intended that it should be, an identity document. The law does not require drivers to carry their licence with them and there are no plans to change this.

Car Accidents

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will show the number of car accidents involving drivers aged *(a)* 17 to 20 years, *(b)* 21 to 30 years, *(c)* 31 to 40 years, *(d)* 41 to 50 years, *(e)* 51 to 60 years, *(f)* 61 to 70 years and *(g)* 70 years and older both as a figure and as a percentage of all drivers in the relevant age category.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is given in the table. Information on the proportion of driving licence holders who are active drivers is not available. This may vary between age groups.

Number of car drivers involved in injury accidents by age: GB 1990 Number of injury accidents involving car drivers of different ages: GB 1990 Percentage of the driving population involved in injury accidents by age: GB 1990

	Number of injury accidents involving car drivers in each age group[1]	*Number of car drivers involved in injury accidents*	*Estimate of number of persons holding a full car driving licence*[2] *(millions)*	*Percentage of all car drivers who are involved in injury accidents*
17-20	42,763	45,131	1·3	3·6
21-30	89,487	101,674	6·3	1·6
31-40	57,773	63,225	5·9	1·1
41-50	42,250	45,056	5·5	0·8
51-60	25,554	26,579	3·8	0·7
61-70	14,655	15,013	2·8	0·5
71 and over	9,226	9,469	1·6	0·6
Total[3]	222,772	330,181	27·2	1·2

[1] Accidents involving drivers in more than one age group are included in each relevant row.

[2] Estimate based on population date for 1990 from OPCS and GRO(S) and data on the percentage of the population holding driving licences from the 1988-90 National Travel Survey.

[3] Including younger ages and unknown ages.

Motorway Repairs

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve maintenance on motorways and to speed up the backlog of essential repairs.

Mr. Chope: We shall be announcing plans later this month.

Coastguard Service

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will specify the consultations including dates of meetings and correspondence on the review of Her Majesty's coastguard in Cornwall with *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* coastguard staff and *(c)* the public.

Mr. McLoughlin: The regional controller of Falmouth search and rescue region consulted all regular coastguard officers and auxiliary coastguards in charge of rescue companies within the region, which includes Cornwall, by means of a first draft regional implementation plan on 5 February 1991. Elements of this plan were widely discussed in Cornwall—we received 33 letters from individuals and organisations between 7 February and 20 March 1991.

The proposals of over 40 regular and auxiliary coastguards were incorporated into the final plan which, as intended, very much reflected local opinion.

The regional controller also personally briefed the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on 8 February 1991, and the hon. Member for Truro on 6 July 1991 about the background to the review, as well as five Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidates for Cornish constituencies between 19 February 1991 and January 1992.

The county emergency planning officer for Cornwall was briefed about the review early in February 1991.

Motorway Accidents

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has undertaken on the causes of accidents on motorways.

Mr. Chope: The main causes of motorway accidents, driving too fast and too close to the vehicle in front, have been established for some years. Current departmental research is aimed at developing solutions and includes experiments with chevron markings; yellow bar markings on slip roads; automatic fog and incident detection equipment and advanced variable message signs.

Cycling Helmets

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has undertaken on the effectiveness of cycle helmet wearing.

Mr. Chope: A hospital-based study carried out by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory indicated that cycle helmets reduce the risk of cranial injury by 16 per cent. and of serious cranial injury by 30 per cent.

Pollutants

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for developing pollution reduction strategies for key transport pollutants in areas where repeated breaches occur.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 3 February 1992]*: Severe air pollution occurs rarely, and is normally associated with unusual weather conditions. During such periods we advise individuals to use public transport whenever possible, share cars and cut out less important journeys.

We have set in train a number of far reaching measures to reduce motor traffic pollution. New European standards for new cars and heavy diesel vehicles will bring major gains, with tough limits becoming mandatory from the end of the year. The new emissions check in the MOT test should ensure substantial reductions of carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons. We intend to introduce a metered smoke test in the annual test for heavy diesels.

We are also taking measures to deal with traffic and congestion. These are a mix of traffic management, parking controls and better public transport. We are supporting high levels of investment in British Rail and the underground, and we have recently produced, in conjunction with the bus industry and the local authorities, advice as to how buses can help ease congestion. We also issue guidance to local authorities on how to help cyclists and pedestrians. We are setting up a programme of research into urban road congestion, which will include an assessment of the potential role of road pricing.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dentists, South Down

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many dentist, in the constituency of South Down operate within the national health service; how many operate privately; and what were the figures on 1 January 1987.

Mr. Hanley: The information is available only in respect of those units of management in the Eastern and Southern boards which form all or part of the South Down constituency. The figures for 1 January 1992 also reflect the amalgamation of the Lisburn and Down units of management with effect from 1 April 1990. Details are as follows:

Unit of management	*Health service dentists*	*Private dentists*
1 January 1987		
Down	14	—
Newry and Mourne	19	—
Craigavon and Banbridge	23	—
1 January 1992		
Lisburn and Down	44	—
Newry and Mourne	25	1
Craigavon and Banbridge	32	—

Irish Language Leaving Certificate

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the students from the Republic of Ireland who have obtained places at university in Northern Ireland in 1990-91 and 1991-92 have passed the Irish language leaving certificate.

Dr. Mawhinney: The numbers with higher level Irish language leaving certificate were as follows:

	Number
1990-91	168
1991-92	160

Numbers for those with lower level leaving certificates in Irish language are not available.

Nurses and Health Visitors

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* district nurses and *(b)* health visitors are employed in each of the units of management of each health and social services board in Northern Ireland; and what were the figures on 1 January 1987.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is set out in the following tables:

(a) 31 December 1986

Unit of management	*District nurses*		*Health visitors*	
Eastern Board				
Eastern Board HQ	17	(17·00)	5	(5·00)
South Belfast Community	24	(23·10)	31	(30·06)
East Belfast and Castlereagh Community	43	(40·84)	47	(44·64)
North and West Belfast Community	70	(65·62)	57	(55·46)

Unit of management	*District nurses*	*Health visitors*
Lisburn[1]	39 (37·74)	31 (29·34)
North Down and Ards[1]	61 (56·03)	49 (44·03)
Down[1]	31 (30·50)	19 (18·66)
Northern Board		
Coleraine, Ballymoney and Moyle[1]	40 (38·58)	25 (22·75)
Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey[1]	43 (42·53)	40 (38·38)
Magherafelt and Cookstown:[1]	24 (24·00)	16 (15·60)
Antrim and Ballymena	40 (39·00)	29 (27·07)
Southern Board		
Armagh and Dungannon[1]	37 (36·05)	35 (28·34)
Banbridge and Craigavon[1]	35 (33·60)	37 (34·51)
Newry and Mourne[1]	51 (30·50)	27 (27·00)
Western Board		
Londonderry, Limavady and Strabane[1]	55 (42·46)	40 (39·00)
Omagh[1]	18 (17·22)	15 (13·97)
Fermanagh[1]	25 (25·00)	18 (15·69)

[1] Includes combined District Nurse/Midwives.

Notes:

1. Whole-time equivalent figures are shown in brackets.
2. Figures are shown at *(a)* for 31 December 1986. The nearest date to 1 January 1987 for which figures are available.
3. The reply reflects the changes in Units of Management which took place on 1 April 1990.

(b) 31 December 1991

Unit of management	*District nurses*	*Health visitors*
Eastern Board		
Eastern Board HQ	1 (1·00)	1 (1·00)
Royal Group of Hospitals	13 (11·38)	—
Ulster, North Down and Ards	11 (11·00)	—
North and West Belfast Community	48 (47·48)	62 (58·27)
South and East Belfast Community	57 (56·37)	76 (65·31)
Down and Lisburn[1]	65 (63·14)	50 (45·28)
North Down and Ards Community	49 (41·36)	39 (35·59)
Northern Board		
Causeway	33 (32·60)	25 (23·34)
Bannside	52 (49·58)	43 (40·55)
Loughside	39 (37·33)	43 (41·26)
Southern Board		
Southern Board HQ	—	1 (1·00)
Armagh and Dungannon	41 (40·00)	25 (22·00)
Craigavon and Banbridge Community	32 (30·90)	42 (37·59)
Southern Area Mental Health	12 (12·00)	—
Newry and Mourne	31 (31·00)	30 (28·[illegible]2)
Western Board		
Altnagelvin	16 (16·00)	—
Foyle Community	45 (43·13)	41 (36·50)
Omagh and Fermanagh	44 (44·00)	37 (34.79)

[1] Includes combined District Nurse/Midwives.

Notes:

1. Whole-time equivalent figures are shown in brackets.
2. Figures are shown at *(a)* for 31 December 1986. The nearest date to 1 January 1987 for which figures are available.
3. The reply reflects the changes in Units of Management which took place on 1 April 1990.

New Comber High School

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has yet received a schedule of accommodation from South Eastern education and library board for the proposed New Comber high school; and if he will make a statement about the progress of this scheme.

Dr. Mawhinney: A schedule of accommodation was received by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland in October 1991. A revised schedule has been approved by the Department and returned to the board to enable it to draw up outline plans for the new school.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the revenue expenditure of each regional health authority on health service facilities for patients with a mental handicap for each year since 198[illegible], in cash terms and at 1991 prices.

Mr. Hanley: The information for Northern Ireland is as follows:

Year	*Net hospital running costs* £	*1991 prices* £
1980-81	12,732,578	23,380,546
1981-82	14,327,360	23,[illegible]92,497
1982-83	15,271,295	23,872,588
1983-84	15,970,537	23,860,126
1984-85	16,686,465	23,741,822
1985-86	17,391,292	23,450,724
1986-87	17,831,572	23,278,814
1987-88	18,560,576	22,980,964
1988-89	19,944,274	23,039,651
1989-90	20,541,719	22,284,597
1990-91	21,258,075	21,258,075

The figures do not include increasing levels of expenditure on health care in the community for such patients.

Cash Limits

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cash and running cost limits for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland departmental services in 1991-92.

Mr. Brooke: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, it is proposed that the cash limit for class 17 vote 1 (the Northern Ireland Office) will be increased by £11,236,000 from £773,396,000 to £784,632,000. This is principally to meet additional expenditure on compensation and police costs.

The cash limit for most Northern Ireland departmental services (NID1) for 1991-92 will be decreased by £47,820,000 from £3,119,703,000 to £3,071,883,000. This decrease arises from the transfer to the Northern Ireland Office cash limit (NIO1) of £10,581,000, the transfer to the Northern Ireland independent living fund (NID2) of £726,000 and other technical changes of £36,513,000 (net), including transfers to non-cash limited areas within the Northern Ireland Departments and a surrender of cash limit cover as a result of repayment of loans.

The cash limit for the Northern Ireland independent living fund (NID2) for 1991-92 will be increased by £726,000 from £2,870,000 to £3,596,000. This increase arises from a revision in the assumptions on which payments from the fund are based.

The Running Cost Limit for Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments will be increased by £3,895,000 from £652,593,000 to £656,488,000 primarily reflecting the take-up of £1,199,000 of the end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns 235-40, and the transfer of £2,696,000 from the Department of Social Security in respect of services operated on an agency basis by the Department of Health and Social Services. The revised running cost provision is £162,315,000 for the Northern Ireland Office and [illegible]173,000 for Northern Ireland Departments.

The increase outlined above will not add to the planned total of public expenditure in Northern Ireland in 1991-92.

ENVIRONMENT

Fire Safety

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect multi-seat fires may have on means of escape; and what account has been taken of this within the new Building Regulations.

Mr. Yeo: The means of escape provisions of the Building Regulations have always been based on the assumption that there is unlikely to be more than one seat of fire. Accidental multi-seat fires in buildings are so unlikely that it would not be reasonable to make special provision for them under the regulations.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which the removal of requirements for non-combustible materials and materials of limited combustibility will affect smoke levels and fire load in buildings and the unseen spread of fire and smoke within concealed spaces.

Mr. Yeo: The changes to the guidance on the use of non combustible materials and materials of limited combustibility are not expected to have any significant effect on the smoke levels in buildings, which are determined primarily by the smoke produced by their contents, such as furniture and fittings. Likewise, these changes to the guidance are unlikely to affect the unseen spread of smoke and fire, which is prevented by cavity barriers. The new guidance has not dispensed with controls over the positioning of these barriers, and it takes account of the material lining the cavity.

The fire load is likely to be increased in some buildings where more combustible materials are used in the construction of fire resisting walls and floors. However this is not likely to be of any significance for the overall levels of safety. Because they are fire resisting these elements of construction are unlikely to be heavily involved in a fire until an advanced stage is reached, by which time evacuation would have had to have been completed.

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what effect he expects the deletion of structural non-combustibility requirements from the new building regulations to have on *(a)* levels of (i) fire severity, (ii) smoke and toxic fumes and *(b)* likelihood of premature collapse of structures in fires in buildings constructed to the new regulations.

Mr. Yeo: On points *(a)* (i) and (ii) I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway).

The likelihood of premature collapse should not be affected by the use of combustible materials in the circumstances described in the new guidance to the building regulations. Regardless of their composition fire resisting floors and walls that perform a load bearing function have to maintain that function for the designated test period.

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account was taken in drawing up the building regulations tabled on 10 December of the problem of the increasing number of multi-seat fires of deliberate and terrorist origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: While the value of active fire suppression systems against attacks of deliberate and terrorist origin has been highlighted by the recent spate of incidents, and the new building regulation guidance would have the effect of increasing the number of such installations, the regulations are not an efficient way of countering this problem, compared with good management practices tailored to the particular circumstances, and the vigilance of all concerned. There is a long lead time between changes to the regulations and changes to a significant proportion of the building stock, by which time the nature of the problem may well have changed.

Housing Finance

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total outstanding housing revenue debt at 31 March 1991, the unredeemed reserved part of capital receipts at 31 March 1990 and 31 March 1991 and the total of housing revenue account 1990-91 in year receipts applied to debt redemption in that year.

Mr. Yeo: The reserved part of capital receipts was £4·2 billion at 31 March 1990 and £5·1 billion at 31 March 1991. Information about the total outstanding housing revenue account debt at 31 March 1991 is not yet complete. It is not possible to say how much of the in-year receipts are applied to debt redemption because there is no need for authorities' accounts to relate debt redemption to particular receipts.

Rents, Yorkshire

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the level of rents in *(a)* Wakefield, *(b)* Leeds, *(c)* Kirklees, *(d)* Bradford and *(e)* Calderdale.

Mr. Yeo: The latest available information on average local authority rents per dwelling for the financial year 1991-92 is as follows:

	£ per week
Wakefield	20·22
Leeds	18·70
Kirkless	24·36
Bradford	25·98
Calderdale	24·93

Average annual rents for fair rent tenancies re-registered in 1990-91 and the first quarter 1991 for the West Yorkshire area are published in Department of the Environment Statistical Bulletin (91)3, which is in the Library. This publication also gives details of rents in housing benefit cases referred to rent officers under the Housing Act 1988.

Rating Appeals

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals were settled since 1 April 1990 in respect of *(a)* the pre-national non-domestic rates valuations and *(b)* the NNDR valuations; and how many rating appeals in each category are still outstanding.

Mr. Portillo: The information concerning appeals to valuation and community charge tribunals in England is as follows:

	Cleared between 1 April 1990 and 31 December 1991	*Outstanding at 31 December 1991*
1973 Rating appeals	182,000	4,000
1990 Non-domestic rating appeals	142,000	589,000

Appeals cleared relate to those heard and decided by tribunals or withdrawn or agreed prior to or after hearing.

Many of the 4,000 outstanding 1973 appeals were awaiting decisions by the Court of Appeal in related cases. Most of the 1990 non-domestic rating appeals were not received in tribunals until towards the end of 1990-91.

Leigh Barton

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much public expenditure has been incurred on Leigh Barton; and for how many years it has been in his ownership;

(2) how many years Leigh Barton, near Churstow has been closed to the public; and when it is planned to be reopened.

Mr. Yeo: Leigh Barton was purchased from Devon county council by the Secretary of State for the Environment in April 1974, at a cost of £4,850, and has been in English Heritage's guardianship since 1984. To date, the total estimated costs of maintenance and repair at the property amount to about £300,000.

SSA, Cumbria

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the methodology used by his Department in calculating the standard spending assessment for Cumbria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Cumbria submitted detailed written representations about the proposals for 1992-93 and also brought a delegation to see my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State. The points made by Cumbria were given careful consideration, as were all other representations. Cumbria's standard spending assessment increased by £0·266 million between that issued for consultation purposes and the settlement figure.

Flora and Fauna

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for England and Wales the number of species of *(a)* flora and *(b)* fauna that have become extinct since the introduction of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mr. Baldry: It is probable that no species of flora and five species of fauna have become extinct in England and Wales since the introduction of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of *(a)* the 100 acre site of special scientific interest at Birkham wood, Harrogate, *(b)* the 25 acre site of special scientific interest at Shirley Pool and Rushley Moor wetlands, *(c)* the 2,000 acre site of special scientific interest at Ingleborough moors, Yorkshire and *(d)* the 1,000 acre site of special scientific interest at Yorkshire Wolds Chalk Grasslands.

Mr. Baldry: I will write to the hon. Member with the details requested.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to prevent any developments which damage sites of special scientific interest.

Mr. Baldry: Additional safeguards for SSSIs were announced in DOE circular 1/92. These measures together with other statutory provisions set out in the Countryside Act 1968, Wildlife and Countryside Acts of 1981 and 1985 and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 ensure that the special interest of these sites is taken fully into account when development proposals are considered.

Departmental Research and Advice

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all research and advice commissioned by his Department from external organisations or consultants, in connection with part II of the Local Government Bill indicating *(a)* the terms of reference, *(b)* the cost, *(c)* when the work was completed and *(d)* if the work will be published.

Mr. Portillo: We have commissioned CSL Ltd. to advise on the costs and benefits the Local Government Commission might take into account in assessing cases for structural change, and the means by which such costs and benefits could be measured. We hope to make CSL's report available soon.

We have also commissioned social researcher Mr. Alan Hedges to look at means of developing and refining criteria which might be applied to the assessment of community identity and loyalties, and which might be amenable to testing by means of surveys of public habits and attitudes in a given local area; and the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies in Newcastle university to consider the application of geographical information systems in the definition of community boundaries with a view to developing a suitable methodology which the Commission might use. We will decide how to disseminate the results of those studies when we have the final reports.

It is not our policy to reveal the value of individual contracts.

Community Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure correlation between local authority community care plans and future standard spending assessments for personal social services.

Mr. Portillo: Standard spending assessments are the Government's measure of the cost of providing a standard level of service across all local authorities taking account of their social, geographic and demographic characteristics and the services for which they are responsible. Community care plans reflect locally determined service priorities within available resources.

Soft Landscaping

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue a planning policy guidance note along the lines proposed by the Horticultural Traders Association dealing with soft landscaping in association with development proposals.

Mr. Yeo: Trees, plants and shrubs can enhance the appearance of developments and I commend the action of the Horticultural Traders Association in bringing this to the attention of local planning authorities.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account is taken of specific needs which have to be met on a regional rather than local level in the calculation of standard spending assessments for personal social services.

Mr. Portillo: A personal social services standard spending assessment is allocated to each social services authority in England based on its social and demographic characteristics. The standard spending assessment covers the full range of social services not supported by specific grant.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account he takes of existing levels of service in the calculation of standard spending assessments for the personal social services.

Mr. Portillo: The standard spending assessment for personal social services is based on demographic and social indicators which best reflect the cost of providing a standard level of service. It takes no direct account of existing levels of service provision.

Combustion Plants

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the deadline by which large combustion plants should have been granted their licence from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and how many plants had been licensed by that date;

(2) how many power stations owned by PowerGen and National Power have received the required licence from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will list all large combustion plants covered by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 indicating the owners; and whether they have been granted the licence, required under the Act from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Mr. Baldry: Applications for authorisation of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 were received for 203 combustion processes of which 150 are large combustion plants; a list of these plants has been placed in the Library of the House. These should be determined within four months of receipt, or within such longer period as may be agreed with the applicant. But, in cases where commercial confidentiality has been claimed in respect of information contained in an application, this period of four months does not begin until that matter has been resolved, at which time public advertisement and consultation can take place.

On receipt of the applications, HMIP found that additional information was required from all applicants, including PowerGen and National Power, to enable the determination of their authorisation to proceed. In seeking such information, in accordance with schedule 1 of the 1990 Act, the four-month deadline for determining applications was extended, by varying periods. Nineteen authorisations for large combustion plant had been granted by 4 February 1992. PowerGen and National Power originally requested information in 34 of their applications (14 PowerGen and 20 National Power) to be considered as commercially confidential. HMIP refused these requests and the applicants appealed to the Secretary of State against the decision. Appeals (by National Power) in two cases were withdrawn at the end of 1991 and determination of those applications is now proceeding. Thirty-two cases remain subject to appeal.

Until the applications are determined, all existing plants remain subject to control by HMIP under existing air pollution legislation.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the measures undertaken by his Department to achieve the target set for the proportion of household waste to be recycled by 2000; and what is the estimated impact of each measure.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the document "This Common Inheritance—The First Year Report", published in September 1991. Since then we have published a report on deposit and refund systems for beverage containers and batteries. We have commissioned a major study of economic instruments necessary to encourage the recovery of resources from waste. These reports, together with the waste recycling plans now being prepared by every waste collection authority in the country, will enable us to assess the extent of any further action that we will need to take in order to achieve our aim of minimising waste and the target of recycling 25 per cent. of household waste by the end of the decade.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the initiatives undertaken by his Department to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and indicate the estimated reduction for each initiative by *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2005.

Mr. Baldry: The Environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" (Cm 1200) set out the Government's strategy and a first tranche of measures towards Britain's conditional target of returning CO_2 emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2005. The first year report (Cm 1655) set out progress with this strategy.

The savings from this first tranche of measures have been taken into account in the latest scenarios for United Kingdom CO_2 emissions announced by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Energy, on 6 December 1991. Details of these new scenarios are being prepared for publication.

Housing Management

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date he will publish his consultation paper on extending compulsory competitive tendering to housing management.

Sir George Young: I expect to publish it shortly.

Kent Rent Arrears

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the rent arrears of each local housing authority in the county of Kent, as a percentage and in cash terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for Housing and Planning on 3 February 1992 to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) at column *4*.

Local Authority Housing (Applications)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities do not accept housing applications from young single people.

Mr. Yeo: The available information on local authority waiting lists does not separately identify young single people. Under the homelessness legislation, local authorities have a duty to accept responsibility to secure accommodation for young single people who are unintentionally homeless and judged to be in priority need because they are vulnerable. In addition, in the last two quarters a total of 62 local authorities reported securing permanent accommodation under the homelessness legislation, for other young single people.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if there are any proposals to change the 1991-92 cash limit and the net running cost limit for ordnance survey.

Mr. Baldry: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary spring supplementary estimate, the cash limit for ordnance survey, class VIII, vote 12 will be increased by £500,000 from £21,089,000 to £21,589,000. The increase will be charged to the reserve and not therefore added to the planned total of public expenditure. The increase to the cash limit is due to a greater payover of value added tax (VAT) to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise caused by a reduction in capital and running cost expenditure for which OS can reclaim VAT together with the higher sales of OS products which attract VAT.

In addition, the supplementary estimate is required to reflect a shortfall of £2,100,000 in the receipts from the sales of maps and public sector repayment services due to a reduction in the demand for OS products. This shortfall is to be offset by a reduction in capital expenditure of £2,100,000 with no effect on the cash limit.

As a result of the shortfall in receipts the net running cost limit will be increased by £2,070,000 from £21,730,000 to £23,800,000.

Cash Limits

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any changes to announce to his Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the following changes will be made:

(i) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 2 (miscellaneous housing administration and grants) will be increased by £1,700,000 from £195,907,000 to £197,607,000. The increase reflects a transfer a £1,700,000 from the non-voted provision for housing action trusts for borrowing from the national loans funds to grant-in-aid which is voted in estimates. In additions, the running costs provision for rent assessment panels will be increased by £43,000 to £1,904,000 to support the provision of information technology to the panels. This increase in running costs provision will be met from equivalent savings within the running costs provision on class VIII, vote 8, so that the Department's running costs limit remains unaffected by this change;

(ii) The DOE/HC non-voted cash limit will be increased by £950,000 from £1,520,925,000 to £1,521,875,000. This increase results from full take up of entitlement of £950,000 under the end year flexibility scheme for capital projects concerned with schemes for the homeless;

(iii) The DOE/UA non-voted cash limit will be increased by £6,617,000 from £883,814,000 to £890,431,000. This includes increased grant-in-aid of £8,850,000 to the Black Country development corporation for the black country spine road. This increase will be offset by a corresponding reduction in the Department of Transport's cash limit for class VII, vote 1 (national roads, England). In addition, £13,280,000 is required for various projects for other development corporations, to increase resources for local authority sector derelict land grant, and to make payments of urban programme grant and city action team grant where works have progressed faster than anticipated. The costs will be met, in part, from offsetting savings of £12,000,000 on the city grant programme and other savings totalling £3,513,000 from non local authority derelict land grant, urban development grant and inner cities research.

(iv) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 5 (central environmental services, etx) will be reduced by £9,000,000 from £317,840,000 to £308,840,000. The decrease reflects reduced grant-in-aid requirements by the National Rivers Authority.

(v) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 6, (royal palaces, royal parks, historic buildings, etc) will be increased by £71,000 from £176,484,000 to £176,555,000. The increase of £71,000 is required to cover the cost of new charges by the Civil Service Commission for services provided to the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, and by the Treasury solicitors for services provided to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. These increases are offset by equivalent transfers of provision from class VIII, vote 8 (Department of the Environment: administration). In addition, the running costs provision for royal parks will be increased by £600,000 mainly to meet the redundancy and consultancy costs associated with contracting out gardening services. This increase in provision for royal parks will be met from savings within the vote, but the running cost provision on class VIII, vote 8 will be reduced by an equivalent amount so the Department's running cost limit remains unaffected by this change;

(vi) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 8 (Department of the Environment: administration) will be increased by £201,000 from £188,417,000 to £188,618,000. This increase includes a transfer of £200,000 from class VIII, vote 3 (urban aid and derelict land reclamation, England) for costs associated with Manchester's bid for Olympics in the year 2000, and a transfer of £71,000 to class VIII, vote 6 (royal palaces, royal parks, historic buildings, etc) as outlined above. The Department's running cost limit will be reduced by £4,541,000 from £190,061,000 to £185,520,000. The decrease includes reallocation of resources from running costs to non-running costs within this vote, and the equivalent offset to the running cost increases for rent assessment panels on class VIII, vote 2 and for royal parks on class VIII, vote 6, as outlined above;

(vii) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 9 (revenue support grant, payment of non-domestic rates, valuation office rating and valuation services, etc., England) will be decreased by £52,686,000 from £22,759,344,000 to £22,706,658,000. The decrease reflects lower costs in payments to the valuation office, for implementation work on the council tax; and

(viii) The DOE/LACAP non-voted cash limit will be increased by £2,710,000 from £3,016,492,000 to £3,019,202,000. This represents an increase of £3,000,000 for projects to help the homeless, partly offset by a decrease of £290,000 due to lower than expected take up of estate action grant.

These increases will be charged to the reserve and not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

2 Marsham Street, London

Sir Philip Goodhart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has reached a decision on the future of 2 Marsham street, London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: We have decided to knock it down. No. 2 Marsham street is a Crown building which houses most of the headquarters staff of my Department and of the Department of Transport. The building is in need of major repair. Following detailed technical studies I am satisfied that repairs on the scale necessary would not be desirable. I have therefore decided that the existing building should be demolished. Options for the future of the site including sale, are now being considered.

The decision to demolish 2 Marsham street means that alternative accommodation has to be found for some 3,000 staff in my Department and the Department of Transport. The Secretary of State for Transport and I are considering our Departments' needs and how they can best be met. For my part, I have asked my officials to draw up proposals for moving a substantial number of the present Department of the Environment Headquarters posts to other locations, reducing my Department's requirement for accommodation in the central Westminster area. I have asked them particularly to examine the opportunities and value for money of relocation to docklands, where I am considering establishing a significant Departmental presence.

Derelict Land Grant

Mr. Carttiss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources are being made available under the derelict land grant programme in 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The resources available in 1992-93 for derelict land reclamatgion under the derelict land grant programme will be £106 million. This represents an increase of 21 per cent. on this year's provision. £9 million of this total has been earmarked for reclamation schemes carried out by private sector companies and voluntary organisations such as groundwork trusts. The remainder has been allocated for reclamation schemes operated by local authorities.

The reclamation of derelict and often seriously contaminated land plays a vital role in recycling previously developed land and returning it to beneficial use. This helps to improve the environment and ensure that the use of greenfield sites for development is kept to a minimum. Since 1979 DLG has funded the reclamation of 15,500 hectares and I expect a further 1,500 hectares to be reclaimed next year.

New priorities and guidelines for DLG were announced in May 1991 introducing greater flexibility in the type of reclamation schemes which can be supported by DLG throughout England. Local authorities applying for DLG are being encouraged to prepare reclamation strategies which are expected to show an increased emphasis on reclamation for environmental and amenity improvement.

In urban and inner city areas we will continue to give priority to reclaiming sites for use by industry and commerce, and for housing provision; providing a demand for these sites has been clearly demonstrated. But environmental improvement can also make an important contribution to urban regeneration and a large number of DLG reclamation schemes designed to provide a new amenity and recreational provision in urban areas is planned to start in 1992-93.

On the urban fringe and in rural areas, DLG will also be widely used for environmental improvement. A range of such schemes is planned for next year which will include the use of derelict land for community forests, the reclamation of derelict canals for amenity use and the conversion of derelict railways into long distance footpaths and cycleways.

I have also decided how the total resources available for DLG should be divided between regions and this distribution is given in the table. Most DLG will go to the northern and midland regions where the concentration of dereliction is greatest. The north-west region and Yorkshire and Humberside will receive £21 million each, (representing increases of 15 per cent. and 25 per cent. respectively compared with last year's allocations). The west midlands wil also receive £20·5 million (14 per cent. up on last year), including £9·21 million for investigative and infilling work in connection with the disused limestone mines in that region.

Table 1 Derelict Land Grant Programme: Distribution of resources by region for 1992-93

Region	*Allocation for 1992-93 (£ million)*	*Percentage increase on this year's allocation*
Northern	12·4	14
North West	21·0	15
Merseyside	8·6	13
Yorkshire and Humberside	21·0	25
West Midlands	20·5	14
East Midlands	13·0	21
London	2·0	43
South West	4·5	72
South East	1·2	77
Eastern	1·0	19
Unallocated	0·8	—
Total	106·0	21

The number of rolling programmes of reclamation has also been substantially increased for 1992-93. In total there will be 26 in operation accounting for £50·5 million of DLG expenditure, with five new programmes starting in Northumberland, Sunderland, Durham, the Croal/Irwell valley and St Helens. Also project Furness will be extended to the whole of the local authority area. Rolling programmes are subject to a review after three years of operation and, following such reviews this year, the Leeds/Liverpool canal corridor programme will be extended to include Rossendale and the major programme at Salford quays will be extended for another three years to complete reclamation there.

Reclamation in areas subject to colliery closures has been an important priority for DLG and will continue to be so in 1992-93. £21 million of DLG resources are planned to be spent in coalfield areas. DLG is now being used in these areas to concentrate on collieries closed before March 1990. British Coal has agreed to take financial responsibility for the reclamation of collieries closing since then and the combined effect of these twin programmes will add increased momentum to the pace of reclamation and regeneration in the coalfields.

Priority is also being given under the DLG programme to dealing with derelict sites which are also badly contaminated. The reclamation costs for such sites are often much higher than average, but need to be dealt with urgently for reasons of public health and safety. In total it is likely that about £25 million of DLG will be committed towards such major schemes, involving seriously contaminated sites, on which work is likely to start next year.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which 20 local authorities have the most outstanding community charge payments; and what are the figures.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* Information is available about the arrears of community charge at 31 March 1991 for 358 out of 366 charging authorities. Of those authorities for which information is available the following have the highest arrears in terms of amounts outstanding.

	£ million
Birmingham	60·4
Lambeth	50·1
Brent	32·4
Bristol	31·2
Leeds	31·2
Hackney	27·7
Sheffield	26·0
Haringey	23·7
Leicester	23·3
Ealing	22·1
Southwark	21·6
Newham	21·5
Islington	20·3
Nottingham	18·2
Waltham Forest	17·4
Camden	16·5
Sandwell	16·3
Wirral	15·5
Newcastle upon Tyne	14·4
Walsall	13·9

It should be noted that no information is available for Liverpool, Manchester, Coventry, Northampton, Oxford, Derwentside, Newbury and Oswestry.

Contaminated Land

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a right of appeal to a landowner or occupier from the decision of a local authority including his land on a register of potentially contaminated sites and for deregistration to be undertaken in the event of appropriate clean-up measures having been taken.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* Local authorities compiling registers under section 143 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will be required to record all land which is, or has been, subject to specific contaminative uses to be listed in regulations. An objection to the registration of a site could thus be based only on a factual question concerning the site's use, and therefore no formal appeal procedure is considered necessary. However, an authority which refused to correct an error would lay itself open to judicial review or civil legal action.

Under section 143 sites cannot be deregistered after treatment, but registers will record details of any investigation or treatment which may have been carried out. Treatment rarely removes all contamination, and purchasers, planners and developers will continue to require information on the history and treatment of sites. Contamination from a site may also affect other land or water, and purchasers of affected land and bodies responsible for environmental protection will need to refer to registers for information on the sources of such contamination.

In addition, deregistration of sites after treatment would have to be carried out by the local authorities responsible for registers. They would thus give an implicit assurance that the site in question was free from contamination. This would raise questions of liability if contamination was later found still to be present. It is unlikely that many authorities would be willing to give such an undertaking.

Water Pollution

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many successful prosecutions the National Rivers Authority has achieved since its inception, for pollution of *(a)* the River Trent and *(b)* other rivers and seas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that between 1 September 1989 and 30 November 1991 the National Rivers Authority—NRA—brought 1,104 successful prosecutions for water pollution offences in England and Wales. Of these 239 arose in the Severn Trent region. Information on prosecutions for pollution of individual rivers is not centrally available, although details could be obtained from the NRA's regional office.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Companies (Trade Aid)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which company or companies were the beneficiaries of the aid and trade provision made available for projects involving *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* Morocco, *(c)* Panama, *(d)* Jordan, *(e)* India, *(f)* China and *(g)* Malaysia for 1991.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1991 aid and trade provision funds were disbursed in respect of projects in these countries involving United Kingdom lead companies:

(a) Turkey
  British Gas
  Amec International Construction
  TQ International
  Hallam Associates
  Thames Water International

(b) Morocco
  John Brown Engineering

(c) Panama
  John Brown Engineering

(d) Jordan
  Ransome and Rapier

(e) India
  GEC Turbine Generators
  Boving

(f) China
  GEC Turbine Generators
  Plessey Controls
  The MVA Consultancy
  Dunlop International Projects
  Balfour Beatty
  Metrotec Group
  Mott MacDonald
  Davy McKee (Poole)
  British Shipbuilders
  Platt Saco Lowell UK
  GPT International
  Snamprogetti

(g) Malaysia
  John Laing International
  Balfour Beatty
  Sir William Halcrow and Partners
  Acer John Taylor
  Transmark International
  Knight Piesold and Partners

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Government publications are designed to explain to companies the purpose and the benefits of the aid trade provision; and from which government department these government publications can be procured.

Mrs. Chalker: The purpose and benefits of the aid and trade provision are explained in the ATP "Guidelines for Applicants" booklet. This may be obtained from the Projects and Export Policy division of the Department of Trade and Industry or from the Crown Agents, CDC and ATP Department of the Overseas Development Administration. Copies of the booklet have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Agricultural Specialists

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many full-time agricultural specialists the Overseas Development Agency has overseas at present; and how many of them are women.

Mrs. Chalker: The Overseas Development Administration has 10 headquarters staff members working as full-time agricultural specialists overseas, of whom one is a woman. In addition we have a total of 106 contract officers employed overseas on technical co-operation assignments of whom 10 are women. This figure includes 16 staff from our agency, the Natural Resources Institute, all of whom are men.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made in the 1991-92 cash limit for expenditure by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Chalker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit on the Overseas Aid Vote (class II vote 5) will be increased by £22,188,000 from £1,638,342,000 to £1,660,530,000. The increase primarily provides for additional bilateral assistance to the former Soviet Union. The supplementary also provides for an increase of £900,000 in the net running costs limit of the Natural Resources Institute. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

PRIME MINISTER

VAT

Mr. Molyneaux: To ask the Prime Minister if he will indicate the provisions *(a)* under which the EC could propose an increase in the VAT rate in the United Kingdom and *(b)* under which the United Kingdom may veto the proposal.

The Prime Minister: No such proposal exists. Under the provisions of article 99 of the treaty of Rome, the Commission of the European Community could, in theory, propose for example, a minimum standard rate higher than that in the United Kingdom. However any such proposal, in common with all fiscal matters under article 99 of the treaty, would be subject to unanimity and thus the United Kingdom retains an absolute right of veto.

Peru

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the President of Peru on biodiversity in the Peruvian rain-forest and its protection.

The Prime Minister: I discussed with President Fujimori the forthcoming UN Conference on Environment and Development. I emphasised the importance we attach to effective conventions on climate change and biodiversity, as well as an agreement on principles for the sustainable use and management of all types of forest.

RECHAR

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will make a study of the differences in United Kingdom and Italian practice in the use of regional funds, such as RECHAR.

The Prime Minister: Members of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Community visited Italy in October 1991 during their inquiry into EEC regional development policy. Their report has been published and is available in the Library.

Italy is not eligible for RECHAR.

Communist Party (Meetings)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all meetings by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of Her Majesty's Government with (i) Ministers, (ii) diplomats and (iii) other Communist party officials of the former Soviet Union since May 1979 in (1) the United Kingdom and (2) elsewhere; and what were the purposes of the ministerial and diplomatic meetings.

The Prime Minister: Detailed information of this kind is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. There are, however, frequent contacts with Ministers and officials of the former Soviet Union at all levels on questions of mutual interest.

Disarmament Paper

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will obtain for the library at 10 Downing street a copy of the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs topical paper No. 5 (1991), "Conversion: Economic Adjustments in an Era of Arms Reductions" (Volume II).

The Prime Minister: The publication is available from the United Nations documents section in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from where copies will be obtained as required.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

ENERGY

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *505*, whether Schroder Wagg's appointment as head underwriters to the regional electricity companies sale was by competitive tender.

Mr. Wakeham: Yes.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy further to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *505*, if he will list those advisers whose appointments were not subject to competitive tender.

Mr. Wakeham: The five appointments referred to in that answer as not subject to competitive tender were:

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (AGR output).
J. Henry Schroder Wagg (Trade sale).
John Chiene (Pricing).
Professor Littlechild (Regulatory).
R. L. Associates (Setting X for Area Boards).

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the initiatives taken by his Department to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and indicate the estimated reduction for each initiative by *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2005.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income and Benefit Levels

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all benefits payable to those with incomes over £25,000 a year; how many in this income category receive them; what is the total cost of each benefit to persons with these incomes; and what is the average value of the benefit to those above this income level.

Mr. Jack: The main social security benefits which are not income-related, and could therefore be payable, provided other criteria are met, to benefit units with incomes over £25,000 a year, are as follows:

Retirement pension
Christmas Bonus
Widows' Benefits
Unemployment Benefit[1]
Sickness Benefit
Statutory Sick Pay
Invalidity Benefit
Industrial Disablement Benefit
Industrial Death Benefit
Maternity Allowance
Statutory Maternity Pay
Non-contributory Retirement Pension
Invalid Care Allowance
Severe Disablement Allowance
Attendance Allowance[2]
Mobility Allowance
Child Benefit
One Parent Benefit
War Disablement Pension
War Widows' Pension

[1] Unemployment benefit is not paid to those with earnings in excess of £52 a week, and those aged 55 or over and getting more than £35 a week under an occupational or personal pension scheme have their unemployment benefit reduced by 10p for every 10p of pension over £35.

[2] Mobility allowance and attendance allowance will be replaced by disability living allowance in April 1992 for those who become disabled before aged 65.

It is not possible to give meaningful information for these benefits individually, because the sample sizes are too small to draw reliable data from. Details of claimants' incomes are not collected routinely, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Benefits (Capital Disregards)

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will increase the £3,000 capital disregard on income support and housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The limit below which capital is completely ignored continues to be kept under review, as with all aspects of the benefit system, but there are no plans to change it at present.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state for each year since 1979 the numbers of claimants of supplementary benefit or income support towards the cost of private residential care who have subsequently claimed benefit towards the costs of private nursing care and then again claimed towards the cost of private residential care.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants in the Wakefield benefit office's area are currently claiming towards the cost of *(a)* private nursing care, *(b)* private residential care and *(c)* voluntary nursing or residential care.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Building Society Accounts

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will meet the Building Societies Association to discuss the imposition of charges on small accounts and the implications for pensioners and other recipients of state benefits paid direct into such accounts.

Miss Widdecombe: We have already been in contact with the Building Societies Association (BSA). I understand that the Halifax building society is the only BSA member currently planning to make such charges. People who wish their benefits payments to be made into an account at another building society should contact their local social security office and with details of the new account. The procedure involved is a simple one and the staff there will be happy to help them.

Cash Limits

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether there have been any changes in the cash limits or running costs limits of his Department for 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XIV, vote 4 (administration and miscellaneous services) will be increased by £22,716,000 from £1,901,217,000 to £1,923,933,000. The revision takes account of the additional administrative expenditure arising from new procedures for the payment of mortgage interest in respect of income support recipients (£10,881,000), an increase in agency payments to Department of Employment (class VI, vote 2) (£30,000,000), a transfer to Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) vote 3 of £1,161,000, a transfer from Department of Health (class XIII, vote 3) of £819,000, a transfer from Property Services Agency of the Department of the Environment (class VIII, vote 13) of £260,000, a transfer from Department of Employment: Employment Service (class VI, vote 2) of £657,000, a transfer to Department of Health (class XIII, vote 3) of £50,000 and a transfer to Scottish Office (class XV, vote 20) of £35,000). The additional requirements are partially offset by an increase in receipts of £18,655,000 and the balance (£22,226,000) will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

In addition to the running cost increases included above there is also an increase of £6,790,000 to take account of expenditure previously classified as capital now being regarded as running costs.

As a result of these changes the running costs limit of the Department of Social Security will be increased by £9,145,000 from £2,149,908,000 to £2,159,053,000.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Adoption

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each of the last three years, *(a)* how many children have been brought into the United Kingdom for adoption through private or unauthorised channels, *(b)* out of that total how many of these adoptions were found to be unsuitable and *(c)* what was the average waiting time for adoption/immigration authorisation relating to children from (i) Romania, (ii) Brazil and (iii) Colombia.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Only very limited information is available except in relation to Romanian children brought here during the last two years. In 1990, 83, and in 1991, 13 Romanian children were brought to the United Kingdom without entry clearance with a view to adoption. No Romanian children have been brought to the United Kingdom without entry clearance so far this year. The average waiting time for decisions on entry clearance applications made on behalf of Romanian children for the purpose of adoption was approximately six weeks in 1991. Information is not held centrally on the progress and outcome of subsequent adoption proceedings in the United Kingdom.

Punt-Gunning

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many black powder licences were issued in each of the last three years, by county, for the purpose of punt-gunning.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on the numbers of black powder licences—which were superseded on 1 November 1991 by explosives certificates—issued by chief officers, and their purpose, is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state for each of the last five years for which figures are available the number of persons granted right of permanent stay broken down by country of origin.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on persons accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in the years 1986-90, by nationality, is published in table 14 of the Home Office Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1990" (Cm 1571), a copy of which is in the Library. Corresponding information for 1991 is not yet available.

Mr. John Kamara

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reach a decision regarding the case of Mr. J. Kamara, a constituent of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, who is serving a prison sentence.

Mr. John Patten: I expect to receive a police report on the many inquiries conducted in this case very soon. I will then be in a position to decide whether any action on my part is appropriate.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the names of the people who have written to him concerning the case of John Kamara, a prisoner; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No. It is not our practice to publish the names of persons who have contacted us about individual cases. We have received many letters including more than 100 from Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament.

Cash Limits

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for changes to the 1991-92 cash limits within his responsibilities and to his Department's running costs limit.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit on class IX, vote 2, prisons, England and Wales, will be increased by £137,000,000 which, after the surrender of the increase of £3,949,000 for end-year flexibility announced by my right hon. Friend, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, on 17 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns 185-88, will increase from £1,332,391,000 to £1,469,391,000. The additional provision is necessary because of the continuing need to pay for the cost of keeping prisoners in police cells. Extra provision is also necessary to meet the construction costs of new prisons and for the accelerated integral sanitation programme. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The cash limit on class IX, vote 3 will be reduced by £19,000,000 from £890,952,000 to £871,952,000, to reflect a transfer of resources to class IX, vote 1 for the purpose of criminal injuries compensations payments and a special grant to the Northumbria police authority.

The Home Office running cost limit will remain unchanged at £1,304,000,000.

Firemen

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* full-time firemen and *(b)* part-time firemen employed in the United Kingdom for each year since 1981.

Mr. John Patten: The information for England and Wales is given in the table. Questions relating to the fire service in other parts of the United Kingdom are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Year	*Number of full-time firefighters*	*Number of part-time (retained) firefighters*[1]
1981	34,223	15,745
1982	34,117	15,535
1983	34,206	15,887
1984	34,536	16,129
1985	34,575	16,144
1986	34,783	16,138
1987	34,515	15,984
1988	35,011	16,126
1989	34,784	15,861
1990	35,002	15,959
1991	35,162	16,025

[1] These figures include wholetime firefighters with retained obligations

Betting Offices

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received concerning the consultative document on the evening opening of licensed betting offices; and when he hopes to make a statement on his conclusions;

(2) how many letters he has received for, and how many letters against, the evening opening of betting offices; and for how long he is prepared to consider further representations.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since issuing our consultation document on the evening opening hours of licensed betting offices on 14 October, we have received representations on both the principle and the practicalities of evening opening of licensed betting offices. We have received 27 letters in favour of evening opening and 518 letters against it, as well as a petition against evening opening with some 1,650 signatures. A number of the letters on both sides represent the views of trade associations or other interest groups.

We are now considering the representations received, in the light of which some further consultations may be necessary. It is not possible to predict at this stage how quickly that work can be completed, but we are prepared to consider further representations in the meantime.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he is giving to the precise times of evening opening of betting offices and days of the week and, specifically, the opening of betting offices on Sundays.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Our consultation document set out the main options for regulating the times and days of evening opening. We are considering the views expressed in response to that document before deciding whether betting offices should be allowed to open in the evenings and, if so, at what times. The consultation exercise does not extend to Sunday opening of betting offices on which we have no present plans to legislate.

Street Deaths

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the figures for deaths on public streets in (i) London, (ii) Manchester, (iii) Birmingham, (iv) Liverpool and (v) England and Wales due to causes other than violence or road traffic accidents for the periods 1 October 1990 to 30 April 1991; and for the year ended 31 December 1991.

Mr. John Patten: I understand from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys that to answer this question would involve disproportionate cost.

Poland (Visas)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about visa requirements relating to Poland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Last year about 120 representations were received from right hon. and hon. Members about the visa requirement for Polish nationals, and about 50 letters from members of the public.

A recent review of the visa requirement has led my right hon. Friend to conclude that it is too soon to assess the experience of some of our European partners who have abolished visas for polish nationals. My right hon. Friend has decided therefore to look again at the need for this requirement in the summer when the effect of visa abolition on other member states of the Community should be clearer.

Solicitors' Telephone Calls

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate allegations by the Criminal Law Solicitors Association that telephone calls from solicitors to prisoners held by the City of London police are recorded and stored on tape.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police for the City of London that until recently all telephone calls to custody suites were tape recorded at a point after they had left the public network. This was done for operational purposes and overlooked the fact that privileged conversations between solicitors and their clients were also covered. Recordings of privileged conversations were never listened to by police officers and the tapes were held centrally in conditions of strict security, with access controlled by a senior officer and requiring knowledge of confidential codes. As soon as it was realised that privileged conversations were on tape, separate telephone lines which are not subject to tape recording were installed in custody suites.

Mrs. Bushra Ahmed

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has made a formal complaint to the appellate authorities at their failure to formally advise his Department of their refusal to grant leave to appeal to the IAT in the case of Mrs. Bushra Ahmed (IMP A399195/2); what prompted the file to come to light in May 1991; and for what reasons Mrs. Ahmed, to date, has not been issued with a visa following his advice to the post to issue her with a visa on 31 May 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 23 January 1992]*: The records kept by the immigration appellate authorities show that copies of the immigration appeals tribunal's determination refusing the Home Office leave to appeal against the adjudicator's decision to allow Mrs. Ahmed's appeal were sent out on 30 January 1990. It appears, however, that the determination was not at that stage received by the Home Office presenting officer. He noticed this in December 1990 when the file was brought forward by the procedures intended to track the progress of appeals. Unfortunately there was then some further delay within the Immigration and Nationality Department, which despite investigation cannot be accounted for, before the determination was forwarded to the high commission in Islamabad on 31 May 1991. I understand that the adjudicator's determination allowing Mrs. Ahmed's appeal arrived at the high commission on 12 June 1991 but there was then a clerical error and the papers were put away before a visa was issued.

The high commission wrote to Mrs. Ahmed on 16 December 1991 inviting her to call in to collect her visa. To date she has not done so and a further invitation was sent on 23 January.

I greatly regret the combination of errors which led to the issue of a visa to Mrs. Ahmed being so badly delayed. Officials are examining the procedures which are followed in such cases, in order to prevent any recurrence.

Bail Offenders

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce his conclusions following the review of the recent studies of offending on bail.

Mr. John Patten *[pursuant to his reply, 23 January, col. 314]:* My Department has published today research and planning unit paper 65 "Offending while on bail: a survey of recent studies". A copy has been placed in the Library. The Government are considering, in the light of the survey, what further action is needed to reduce offending on bail, and we will make an announcement shortly.

Fire Statistics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the total number of business premises that have been damaged by fires caused by *(a)* arson, *(b)* accident and *(c)* unknown causes during each of the past 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* The available information relates to fires attended by local authority fire brigades and is shown in the following table.

Fires in business premises[1] attended by local authority fire brigades by supposed cause of fire, 1981-90

United Kingdom

Year	*Number of fires in business premises[1] attended by local authority fire brigades* *Total*	*(a) Deliberate or possibly deliberate[3]*	*(b) Accidental*	*(c) Unknown*
1981	18,077	3,018	13,614	1,445
1982	18,282	3,196	13,926	1,160
1983	18,310	3,505	13,784	1,021
1984	19,317	4,044	14,283	990
1985	19,316	3,971	14,559	786
1986	18,970	4,002	14,214	754
1987	18,542	3,608	14,297	637
[2]1987	20,228	3,866	15,663	699
[2]1988	20,717	4,027	16,008	682
[2]1989	21,145	4,004	16,578	563
[p]1990	20,800	4,270	16,030	500

[p] Provisional.

Source: Home Office Fire Statistics.

[1] Defined as buildings used for industrial, distribution, hotels, catering, transport, communication and financial trades.

[2] Definition of business premises from 1988 includes repair of consumer goods and services, accountancy, legal and other professional and technical services, 1987 also shown on an approximately comparable basis.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Meale: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the numbers of mortgage repossessions in the Nottinghamshire and Mansfield areas by county court division for each year since 1979.

The Attorney-General: The figures for the number of repossessions are not collected. The only information available on mortgage possession is the number of actions entered and orders made in each county court. The tables give the information for each county court in Nottinghamshire from 1987—the earliest year for which it is available. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all of the orders made will have resulted in the execution of warrants of possession. At this stage the 1991 figures are provisional and therefore liable to revision in the future.

Mortgage possession
Actions entered and orders made in the Nottinghamshire county courts

Court name	*Actions entered*	*Orders made*
1987		
Mansfield	518	348
Newark	101	57
Nottingham	1,492	532
Worksop	312	176
1988		
Mansfield	411	340
Newark	72	61
Nottingham	1,036	600
Worksop	247	184
1989		
Mansfield	445	282
Newark	101	48
Nottingham	1,085	581
Worksop	244	127
1990		
Mansfield	664	437
Newark	139	94
Nottingham	2,114	1,062
Worksop	363	257
1991		
Mansfield	922	624
Newark	161	112
Nottingham	2,235	1,483
Worksop	445	345

Cash Limits

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether any change has been made to the cash limit for the Treasury Solicitor's Department.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class X vote 9 will be increased by £743,000 from £11,865,000 to £12,608,000.

The additional provision is required to meet the cost of major accommodation works and the cost of the inquiry into the supervision of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether he proposes any changes to the Serious Fraud Office's cash and running costs limits for 1991-92.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class X vote 7 will be increased by £110,000 from £8,862,000 to £8,972,000. Within this total the Department's running costs limit will be increased by £110,000 from £8,132,000 to £8,242,000.

This increase will enable the Serious Fraud Office to meet additional administrative costs associated with the investigation into the Maxwell group of companies and for further inquiries into the affairs of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether he proposes any changes to the Crown Prosecution Service's cash and running costs limits for 1991-92.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class X, vote 5 will be increased by £300,000 from £157,433,000 to £157,733,000. Within this total the Department's running cost limit will be increased by £3,350,000 from £149,390,000 to £152,740,000.

Additional provision is required to enable the Crown Prosecution Service to meet the cost of implementation of the War Crimes Act 1991 and the costs of employing additional legal staff. Most of the increase in running costs expenditure has been offset by savings on capital expenditure.

The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes are proposed to the class X, vote 12 running costs limit for the Public Record Office.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary token supplementary estimate, the running costs limit for class X, vote 12 will be increased by £201,000 from £19,292,000 to £19,493,000. This increase covers costs associated with agency launch and certain payments to Property Holdings, and will be contained within the overall cash limit as a result of increased appropriations in aid.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Information Systems

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will name the parties to whom his Department has sent, and with whom his Department has consulted on, the OECD produced guidelines for the security of information systems, explanatory memorandum, and recommendation of the council: draft documents (reference No. DSTI/ICCP/AH(90)21/Rev3).

Mr. Leigh: During preparatory work on draft OECD guidelines for the security of information systems and associated documents, which continue to be in draft, the Department of Trade and Industry has consulted all United Kingdom Government Departments having an interest. The Department has also consulted its Information Technology Security Advisory Group, comprising a range of IT security specialists from the private sector and academia.

The OECD is also advised direct on the draft guidelines through information system security experts on its Business and Industry Advisory Committee, which includes a number of representatives from the United Kingdom.

Cash Limits

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash limit and running costs limit for 1991-92.

Mr. Lilley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV, vote 2 (support for industry, international trade, statutory and regulatory work, consumer protection, and administration) will be reduced by £5,000,000 from £763,019,000 to £758,019,000. The running costs limit for the Department of Trade and Industry will be reduced by £2,238,000 from £258,236,000 to £255,998,000.

The supplementary estimate covers a rise of £9,245,000 in gross provision for the consultancy initiatives, reflecting higher than expected demand for the scheme, and a rise of £1,587,000 in gross provision for consumer and investor protection, reflecting increased expenditure on companies investigations. These increases are wholly offset by reductions in gross provision and increases in appropriations in aid elsewhere on the vote, including an increase of £2,147,000 in receipts appropriated in aid of the consultancy initiatives.

There is an increase of £4,346,000 in departmental capital expenditure and research establishments' major building works and capital expenditure as a result of the end-year flexibility arrangements for capital announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns 183-88.

There are reductions of £2,828,000 in voted provision for long term loans to the Patent Office Executive Agency trading fund and of £2,000,000 for long term loans to Companies House Executive Agency trading fund, reflecting a lower requirement for such loans than originally forecast. There are also reductions in net provision of £520,000 for the Patent Office and £561,000 for Companies House in respect of the period before they became trading funds, 1 April to 30 September 1991.

There are transfers within provision for Radiocommunications, Warren Spring Laboratory and the National Physical Laboratory executive agencies. These transfers have no effect on the net total for each agency.

There are also a number of other minor changes to the vote, as shown in the supplementary estimate, to reflect the latest forecasts of expenditure and receipts.

The reduction in the running cost limit mostly reflects the transfer of funds for routine maintenance and rent to capital.

As supplementary estimates cannot reduce total voted provision, the supplementary estimate gives effect to these changes through an increase of a net token £1,000 in class IV, vote 2. The accompanying cash limit reduction of £5,000,000 for trading funds and greater Insolvency Service receipts than shown in the supplementary estimate itself.

DEFENCE

"Options for Change"

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will publish details of defence expenditure changes under "Options for Change" already implemented and those envisaged for the next 12 months.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Details of trends in Defence spending between 1990-91 and 1994-95 are published today in "The Government's Expenditure Plans for the Ministry of Defence" (Cmd 1901)—which will be placed in the Library of the House. These figures take full account of plans developed as a result of earlier work on "Options for Change".

Gulf War

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence his Department has received that ammunition supplied by United Kingdom companies under the Jordan defence packages was used by Iraqi forces during military operations in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Cash Limits

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he proposes any changes to the defence cash limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Tom King: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary spring supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

Defence cash limits

£'000s

Class and vote	*Current cash limit*	*Change*	*Revised cash limit*
I, 1	10,460,332	+130,116	10,590,448
I, 2	9,549,823	+329,257	9,879,080
I, 3	1,620,347	−4,958	1,615,389
I, 4	1,888,094	−80,737	1,807,357
I, 5	513,918	+18,371	532,289

These changes increase the block defence cash limit by £392,049,000 from £24,032,514,000 to £24,424,563,000. They are principally to cover increased expenditure arising from the United Kingdom military commitment in the Gulf. The total increase this year is thus about £1·5 billion which is in line with the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 18 April 1991, *Official Report*, at column 558.

The changes also take account of a transfer of provision from class I, votes 3, 4 and 5 to cover forecasts of increased expenditure on class I, vote 1 and a decrease of £71,211,000 to compensate for an overspend on class I, votes 1, 4 and 5 in financial year 1990-91. This follows the normal practice of reducing the limit for one year by the amount of any overspend in the previous year.

The increase in defence provision for 1991-92 will be charged to the reserve and it will therefore not add to the planned total of public expenditure. The increase will be largely offset by the generous cash contributions from other Governments received this financial year in respect of the United Kingdom military commitment in the Gulf.

Security Guards (Faslane and Coulport)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what monitoring his Department carries out of the hours worked by and hourly rates payable to private security guards at Faslane and Coulport.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Ministry of Defence does not employ civilian security guards at the Clyde submarine base. Civilian security firms, hired by the Property Services Agency and its contractors, are used at construction sites at Faslane and Coulport. The terms and conditions of these personnel are a matter for their employers.

Company Contracts

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on letting further contracts to companies which have been convicted of breaches of health and safety legislation committed in the course of fulfilling earlier contracts with his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A breach of health and safety legislation would not preclude a company from receiving contracts from the Ministry of Defence, provided remedial action was proposed, or had been undertaken, to the satisfaction of the appropriate enforcement authority and having regard to operational and other considerations.

Health and safety legislation is a matter for the Secretary of State for Employment.

Soviet Nuclear Weapons

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Ministry of Defence officials will be sent on the technical mission to Moscow to assess the immediate needs on handling surplus Soviet nuclear weapons and safeguarding nuclear materials.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Detailed planning for co-operation has not yet been completed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will report to the House as soon as possible.

Soviet Union (Members' Visits)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the date of each briefing afforded to hon. Members by his Department in advance of visits to the former Soviet Union since May 1979.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not available, as the Department has no need to maintain such records.

Polaris Submarines

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the requirement for a fifth Polaris submarine.

Mr. Alan Clark: No assessment of the possible requirement for a fifth Polaris submarine has been made since the early 1970s.

Russian Armed Forces

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence personnel will be sent to the Russian Ministry of Defence to discuss the control and financing of armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government have offered to send a small number of officials from the Ministry of Defence to the Russian Ministry of Defence to advise on the restructuring and control and financing of armed forces in a democratic society.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Customs Officers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) in which ports and airports the main reductions in manning levels of customs preventative officers will take place;

(2) how many customs preventative officers will be in post on the 31 March 1993.

(3) what consideration he gave to the effective control of drug trafficking in approving the recent reductions by the Board of Customs and Excise of the number of front-line customs officers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In determining Customs anti-smuggling resources required for 1992-93 the aim has been to provide a service which is better equipped and targeted at areas of highest risk. A further consideration is the more flexible approach being adopted in the way in which the controls are organised; this involves a move away from the static controls previously used.

This approach has been adopted nationally as a result of the review of anti-smuggling controls completed by the Department in 1989. The changes in no way reduce the effectiveness of controls against drug trafficking. Customs are also taking steps to ensure provision of more timely and adequate intelligence in discussion with trade organisations and with other Customs and other law enforcement services.

Changes at particular ports and airports depend upon the extent to which local heads of executive units will be able to make use of flexible anti-smuggling teams and the risk category of the traffic in particular locations. Details by port and airport are not yet available.

The total number of anti-smuggling staff employed at the frontier at 31 March 1993 is expected to be just under 3,500. These staff will be supplemented by further resources on associated duties.

Small Businesses

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has about the extent of compliance by branch offices of the clearing banks with the codes of business practice concerning small businesses agreed by their head offices.

Mr. Maples: Officials are currently reviewing the codes and how they are being implemented. All the codes establish complaint procedures for customers who feel they have been treated badly, and so, in the first instance, it is for the customers to judge compliance with the codes and to use the banks' published complaints procedure, where necessary.

EC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the outturn for 1991 and the forecast for 1992 of the United Kingdom's total gross and net contributions to the European Community budget, in current and constant 1990 prices.

Mr. Maude: A final outturn figure for 1991 and a precise current price forecast for 1992 of the United Kingdom's gross and net contributions to the European Community budget are not yet available. They will be published in the "Statement on the 1992 Community Budget" before the Easter recess.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the balance of trade in manufactures with *(a)* the rest of the EC and *(b)* the rest of the world, for each year since 1987.

Mr. Mellor: Figures for the balance of trade in manufactures with the rest of the EC are published in tables II and V of the CSO's "Business Monitor: Overseas Trade Statistics of the UK." Figures for the balance of trade in manufactures with the rest of the world are published in table A9 of the CSO's "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" and table 2.3 of the "Pink Book, the UK Balance of Payments". All three publications are available in the Library of the House.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest forecast of the public sector borrowing requirement in 1992-93; and what percentage of gross domestic product he expects that to be.

Mr. Mellor: A forecast will be published in the 1992 "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Gross Domestic Product Growth

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimate for gross domestic product growth in 1992.

Mr. Maples: My right hon. Friend will publish a new forecast in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" on 10 March.

Drug Seizures

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the overall figure of seized illegal drugs detected by customs officers in each of the last 12 years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is as follows:

	Kilos			
	Cannabis	*Heroin*	*Cocaine*	*Amphetamine*
1980	25,610	38	35	
1981	24,188	87	13	8
1982	16,245	183	12	2
1983	20,692	212	73	13
1984	26,256	312	35	19
1985	20,905	334	78	26
1986	22,298	179	99	29
1987	16,292	190	362	15
1988	44,018	230	283	18
1989	50,715	331	424	22
1990	24,581	576	561	81
1991	22,500	356	1,061	[1]473

Notes:

1. Figures are for main types of drugs.
2. 1991 figures are provisional.

[1] Figure includes approximately 285 kilos of MDA a derivative of MDMA (known colloquially as 'Ecstasy').

Cash Limits

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the cash and running cost limits for 1991-92 in respect of the Paymaster General's office.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Paymaster General's Office (class XVIII, vote 12) will be increased by £90,000 from £21,358,000 to £21,448,000 and the running cost limit increased by £300,000 from £19,462,000 to £19,762,000. These increases reflect additional costs associated with the systems required to operate on a repayment basis, and to meet additional costs incurred in the ending of weekly pension books.

These increases will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is proposing any change to the Central Office of Information cash limit and running costs limit for 1991-92 and to the services provided on an allied basis by the Central Office of Information for 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 14 will be increased by £30,000 from £28,109,000 to £28,139,000 and the running costs limit by £22,000 from £1,145,000 to £1,167,000. This is accounted for by higher than anticipated expenditure on services to Parliament (£12,000) and the royal household (£18,000). The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he proposes to make to the cash and running cost limits for 1991-92 for the National Investment and Loans Office.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 11 will be increased by £449,000 from £1,000 to £450,000. The additional provision is required to cover a shortfall in fees payable on loans to local authorities. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure. The running costs limit will be reduced by £20,000 from £1,297,000 £1,277,000.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether there will be any changes to the Treasury's running costs limits in 1991-92.

Mr. Maples: The Treasury's running costs limit for 1991-92 is being reduced by £1,213,000 from £86,603,000 to £85,390,000 in order to meet an increased requirement for capital expenditure and an increase in the grant in aid to the Inter-Parliamentary Union. These changes will be reflected in a token supplementary estimate which will be presented for parliamentary approval in due course.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the retail prices index following the abolition of the community charge and its replacement by the council tax.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I intend to reconvene the retail prices index advisory committee with the following terms of reference:

> "To advise the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the implication for the RPI of the abolition of the community charge and its replacement by the council tax; to review progress on implementing the committee's previous recommendation on the inclusion in the index of expenditure on holidays; and to review the present treatment in the index of new cars. In framing its recommendations the committee is asked to take account of the practices in other European Community countries."

VAT

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total number of VAT registrations and deregistrations by region for the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* The information is as follows:

Region	*1987*		*1988*		*1989*		*1990*		*1991*	
	Registration	*Deregistration*	*Registration*	*Deregistration*	*Registration*	*Deregistration*	*Registration*	*Deregistration*	*Registration*	*Deregistration*
Scotland	12,883	10,602	13,565	14,657	10,737	8,137	15,350	12,243	13,395	17,911
North East England	17,236	14,582	20,771	16,482	23,125	16,060	20,023	17,018	17,421	21,613
North West England	22,585	19,964	26,966	22,459	29,806	22,281	28,250	21,417	24,618	28,869
Wales	7,087	5,796	9,259	8,835	9,919	7,362	8,960	7,323	7,013	10,245
Midlands	42,501	32,483	51,411	45,945	54,382	36,896	58,294	38,018	39,689	50,019
South East England	71,671	49,378	81,533	59,561	91,403	58,014	82,732	61,062	71,431	90,251
South West England	24,741	18,686	30,585	29,100	32,448	21,614	26,360	21,273	22,415	30,086
Northern Ireland	3,413	2,920	3,952	7,498	4,074	3,224	4,226	3,113	3,607	3,783

Notes:

1. Regions based on aggregation of local VAT office areas.
2. "New registrations" include both first and other registration, for example a sole proprietor taking on a partner or forming a limited company.
3. De-registrations occur for various reasons other than ceasing trading, for example due to a change of status or falling below the threshold.

The figures for 1991 reflect the substantial increase in the VAT threshold in the 1991 Budget.

WALES

Milford Haven

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what feasibility studies have been initiated by the Welsh Office into the development of Milford Haven into the major deep water port to serve the western arc seaboard of the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: No representations have been received on this matter, but we are aware that Dyfed county council is looking at development opportunities in conjuction with other organisations bordering on the western arc seaboard. My Department, the Welsh Development Agency and other appropriate non-departmental public bodies will continue wherever possible to assist measures to develop Milford Haven's potential.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements for transfer of dowry funds with resettled mental handicap patients to local authorities have been made in each regional health authority; under what terms these payments are made; and if he will list by regional health authority the sums transferred each year on this basis.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Under the all-Wales mental handicap strategy we have introduced arrangements which provide for the transfer of blocks of resources from district health authorities to local authorities as people with a mental handicap move into the community in accordance with agreed joint county plans. This was done by means of a circular to all DHAs and county councils last September. I have placed a copy in the Library of the House. The first formal transfers of resources under this system will be made early in the new financial year.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sales of capital assets have arisen from closures of mental handicap hospitals; and if he will list the assets disposed of and the money raised by each sale.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Since the all-Wales mental handicap strategy was launched in March 1983 two mental handicap hospitals in Wales, Drymma Hall—West Glamorgan health authority—and Allt-y-Mynydd—East Dyfed health authority—have closed. The proceeds of sale, £187,800 and £132,000 respectively, were returned to the authorities concerned and redeployed to improve services for people with mental handicap within the authorities concerned.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by staff grade and specialty, the number of full-time equivalent medical and nursing posts available to health service hospitals in 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on posts is not available centrally.

Readily available information on whole-time equivalent numbers of hospital medical staff by grade and specialty is shown in various editions of the publication "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for Wales", copies of which are in the House of Commons Library. Figures for 1976 are shown in table 3.03, volume 4, 1977; for 1981 in table 3.06, volume 9, 1982; and for 1986 in table 3.06, volume 14, 1987. Information on hospital and community nursing and midwifery staff is also shown—table 3.08(b), volume 4, 1977; table 3.10, volume 9, 1982; and table 3.10, volume 14, 1987. There have been changes over time and figures for different years may not be comparable. Information for 1991 is not yet available.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what studies have been conducted, or are under way, into the administrative work loads of doctors, nurses and clinical staff in the professions associated with medicine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No studies that specifically address the administrative work loads of these staff groups have been undertaken in Wales.

However, such measurements are likely to be facilitated for the professions allied to medicine staff group as a result of a current study—"Workload Measurement Tools"—which the Welsh Health Common Services Authority is undertaking at unit level.

District Nurses

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by health authority the number of full-time equivalent district nursing posts and the number of potential elderly domiciliary clients, as defined by the Department of the Environment under section 80 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, for 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on posts is not available centrally; complete information on the number of staff in post is only available for all nursing and midwifery staff, and not for district nurses.

Section 80 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 requires the Secretary of State to report how revenue support grant is distributed between Welsh local authorities. The formulae in Wales do not explicitly refer to "potential elderly domiciliary clients"—the needs of these people being subsumed in a more general allocation procedure.

Open-heart Operations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *76*, what was the number of open-heart operations carried out at the University hospital of Wales, the Heath, Cardiff, in each year since 1982 inclusive.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information in the form requested is not available. However, information provided by the centrally-funded regional cardiac centre at University hospital of Wales from 1984-85 shows that the following operations were undertaken:

Adult	*By-pass*	*Others*
1984-85	528	30
1985-86	573	26
1986-87	500	48
1987-88	566	—
1988-89	522	90
1989-90	561	77
1990-91	577	65
[1]1991-92	549	60
Paediatric		
[1]1991-92	27	15

[1] To 31 January 1992.

I have recently announced additional contract funding of more than £5 million to expand facilities at UHW to enable it to perform 800 adult open-heart operations per annum and £2·5 million over the next three years to complete the development of the paediatric cardiac unit and equip it to undertake 200 operations each year for children of all ages.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *76*, if he will give the average length of the waiting list for open-heart surgery in the catchment area of the University hospital of Wales, the Heath, Cardiff, for each year since 1982 inclusive and for the whole of Wales, on the same basis.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The only information held centrally relates to waiting lists for cardiac surgery. This is published in "Welsh Hospital Waiting List Bulletin 1991: No. 2" a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Recycling

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the measures undertaken by his Department to achieve the target set for the proportion of household waste to be recycled by 2000; and what is the estimated impact of each measure.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department is involved in a number of measures jointly with the Department of the Environment as part of national programmes; and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the document "This Common Inheritance—The First Year Report" published in September 1991. The combined effect of these measures is designed to minimise waste and encourage recycling. From the information in the reports to be published under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 we will be able to assess the extent of any further action that we will need to take.

Singleton Hospital, Swansea

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what final date he has to announce his decision on the recommendation of 28 January by West Glamorgan relating to the future of the night casualty service at Singleton hospital, Swansea.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There is no prescribed time limit for considering issues such as this. The one-month period for representations to be made to my right hon. Friend on these proposals will end on 28 February. A decision will be made when all representations received have been fully considered.

Soft Landscaping

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will issue a planning policy guidance note along the lines proposed by the Horticultural Traders Association dealing with soft landscaping in association with development proposals.

Mr. David Hunt: I have not seen a copy of the Horticultural Traders Association's proposals, but I join my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in commending the HTA for reminding local planning authorities of the importance of appropriate landscaping for development proposals.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the initiatives taken by his Department to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and indicate the estimated reduction for each initiative by *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2005.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on 6 February.

Cash Limits

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limits for his Department in the current financial year.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit for class XVI, vote 4 will be reduced by £12,644,000 from £156,567,000 to £143,923,000; the cash limit for class XVI, vote 5 will be increased by £641,000 from £393,285,000 to £393,926,000; the cash limit for class XVI, vote 8 will be reduced by £20,912,000 from £1,143,460,000 to £1,122,548,000; the cash limit for class XVI, vote 9 will be increased by £304,000 from £55,406,000 to £55,710,000; the cash limit for class XVI, vote 10 will be reduced by £6,254,000 from £1,775,320,000 to £1,769,066,000. In addition the local authority capital cash limit—WO/LACAP—will be increased by £22,700,000 from £374,662,000 to £397,362,000.

The reduction in the cash limit for vote 4 reflects a lower take-up on employment training than expected. The Welsh Office contribution to the Department of Employment in respect of training activities will be reduced accordingly.

The increase in the cash limit for vote 5 reflects (i) a transfer of provision—£501,000—from class XVI, vote 10 to cover the costs of Bishop Vaughan school which has opted for grant maintained status; (ii) additional provision for the National Biological Standards Board—£63,000; and (iii) provision to cover a grant towards the capital expenditure on the former Cwmbran development corporation's approved roads programme—£77,000.

The net reduction in the cash limit for vote 8 is in respect of: (i) A non-recurrent reduction of £22,000,000 which is required because of technical changes to the present arrangements for the payment of income tax, national insurance and superannuation contributions by health authorities and family health service authorities. This change will mean that contributions for March 1992 will not be drawn from resources in this financial year. There will be no effect upon health service provision in 1991-92 or subsequent years. (ii) An additional sum of £1,200,000 to cover the cost of expenditure incurred by some health authorities in Wales in preparing to treat Gulf war casualties. (iii) A transfer of £38,000 from the Department of Health to provide additional resources for occupational therapy training. (iv) A transfer of £150,000 to class XVI, vote 7 to meet additional costs incurred in non-cash limited pharmaceutical services.

The increase in the cash limit for vote 9 is in respect of the take-up of end year flexibility entitlement from 1990-91 for running costs expenditure—£186,000—and capital administration costs—£118,000—as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns *185-190*.

The reduction in the cash limit for vote 10 comprises (i) the transfer of provision to class XVI, vote 5 in respect of the Bishop Vaughan school—£501,000; and (ii) a reduction in the provision for the costs of council tax banding—£3,253,000—and for prior-year adjustments in local authorities' entitlement to rate support grant—£2,500,000.

The net increase of £22,700,000 in the local authority capital cash limit—WO/LACAP—represents additional provision for home renovation grants.

Hospital Referrals

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will order an investigation into the number of patients in each health authority in Wales who are awaiting referral to a hospital *(a)* outside the authority's control and *(b)* outside the authority's contractual arrangements.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* District health authorities in Wales have assured me that they are not aware of any patients awaiting referral to hospitals in either of these circumstances.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Astronomy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the level of funding for astronomy in the next three years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I understand that the Science and Engineering Research Council plans the following provision for the funding of astronomy and planetary science:

1992-3 £ million	*1993-4 £ million*	*1994-5 £ million*
83·6	90·1	94·5

Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science by what order, made under section 134 of the Education Reform Act 1988, he made the conditions on the funding by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council which he notified to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council on 19 February 1991 and to the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics on 2 September 1991.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Under section 134(6) of the Education Reform Act 1988, the Secretary of State may make grants to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding council of such amounts and subject to such conditions as he may determine. Section 134(7) provides that such conditions shall not relate to making of grants or other payments by the council to any specified institution. Neither of those subsections provides for the making of an order and none was made. Section 134(8) and (9) gives power to the Secretary of state to give directions to the funding council by order but that power was not exercised.

Polytechnics and Colleges

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of students enrolled on full-time and part-time studies in polytechnics and colleges *(a)* in 1979-80, or at incorporation if later and *(b)* currently.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The numbers of students enrolled on full-time courses and part-time courses at polytechnics and colleges in Great Britain in 1979-80 were 217,400 and 168,100 respectively. The comparable figures for 1990-91 were 374,800 and 262,600.

Student Loans

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in respect to the student loan scheme *(a)* the most recent figures for loan applications received, *(b)* the number of loans made, *(c)* the value of loans made and *(d)* the total costs, including VAT, incurred administering the scheme.

Mr. Alan Howarth: As at 4 February 1992, Student Loans Company Limited had received 149,576 applications for loans for the academic year 1991-92 and had paid 125,811 loans worth £65·784 million. The company spent £5·41 million on operating the loans scheme between 1 September 1991 and 31 January 1992. This included net VAT costs of £0·94 million.

Higher Education

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the figures for the number or percentage of qualified leavers and young entrants into higher education, qualified participation indices, for 1979-80 and 1991-92.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The figures requested are as follows:

Great Britain	*1979-80 actual*	*1991-92 projection*
Qualified leaver index	14·7	23·2
Age participation index	12·4	22·5
Qualified participation index	84·0	97·1

The figures for 1991-92 are taken from the Department's latest projection as at April 1991.

Student Grants

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will show the amount of the student maintenance grant in 1978-79 and 1991-92 in constant 1978-79 pounds.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The maximum basic maintenance grant for students in London as defined in the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations was £1,315 for the 1978-79 academic year. The comparable rate for 1991-92 is £2,845 which, together with the maximum full year student loan for London—£660—brings the available resources per student to £3,505, or £1,323 at constant 1978-79 prices. These comparisons take no account of changes in the composition of the mandatory award.

Student Numbers

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current number of home students studying *(a)* full-time at universities, polytechnics and colleges and *(b)* part-time at universities, polytechnics and colleges and at the Open university.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The numbers of home students studying full time in universities, polytechnics and colleges in Great Britain in 1990-91 were 296,200, and 353,500 respectively. The comparable figures for part-time students were 45,200 and 270,000 respectively, with a further 95,000 students enrolled at the Open university.

Student Drop-outs

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the percentage drop-out rate of British home students before achieving diplomas and degrees in full-time and part-time education in the United Kingdom in 1979-80 and 1990-91.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Data for universities are not available in this form. However, table 10 of "University Management Statistics and Performance Indicators in the UK", 1990 edition, indicates the proportions of full-time and sandwich students ending their studies unsuccessfully. This is shown for each university cost-centre, but no overall figure is computed. A copy is in the Library.

For polytechnics and colleges in England, some 16 per cent. of full-time and sandwich first-degree students commencing courses in 1987 did not return to the second year of the course.

St. Fidelis School, Erith

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce a decision on the proposed expansion and extension of St. Fidelis primary school in Erith; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The section 13 proposals published by the governors of St. Fidelis RC primary school are currently being considered. My right hon. and learned Friend will announce his decision shortly.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out the total number of pupils attending grant-maintained secondary schools on the latest available figures.

Mr. Eggar: There are some 103,000 pupils attending secondary schools that are now operating as grant-maintained, based on January 1991 pupil returns.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he proposes any changes to cash limits on votes within his responsibility for 1991-92.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limits for class XI, vote 2, higher and further education, vote 4, administration and vote 5, science, will be amended. The cash limit changes are as follows:

Class and Vote	*Current cash limit* £	*Change* £	*Revised cash limit* £
XI.2	2,916,803,000	+12,188,000	2,928,991,000
XI.4	106,617,000	−1,984,000	104,633,000
XI.5	927,455,000	+4,484,000	931,939,000

The increase on class XI, vote 2 includes the full take-up of £2,688,000 capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 July 1991, at columns *186-89*. It also includes £2,500,000 additional grant-in-aid to the Universities Funding Council as a contribution towards the increased cost to universities of employing clinical academic staff following the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body pay settlement; and provision of £7,000,000 to enable the Open university to purchase the freehold of its site at Walton hall, Milton Keynes. These increases will be met from the Reserve.

The cash limit reduction of £1,984,000 on class XI, vote 4 offsets part of the increase to the cash limit on the science budget, class XI, vote 5.

Of the increase of £4,484,000 in class XI, vote 5, £1,000,000 is to enable the Medical Research Council to meet part of the cost of the clinical research initiative; £1,500,000 is to enable the Science and Engineering Research Council—SERC—to meet the costs of providing buildings to support the work undertaken by holders of SERC grants in higher education institutions; and the remaining £1,984,000 is to enable the Agricultural and Food Research Council to transfer to Unilever plc provision in respect of pensions of staff who were formerly employed by the Plant Breeding Institute. These increases are wholly offset by proceeds from the sale of capital assets which were surrendered to the Consolidated Fund in 1990-91 and by the cash limit reduction on class XI, vote 4. The current cash limit of £927,445,000 on class XI, vote 5 includes an increase of £7,000,000 which I announced in the House on 12 June 1991, at column *356*, but which is also subject to parliamentary approval of the spring supplementary estimate.

University of Wales (Irish Students)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students from the Republic of Ireland are presently receiving their higher education at each of the colleges of the University of Wales; and what is the estimated contribution of his Department towards their tuition fees.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In academic year 1990-91 there were 177 students from the Irish Republic attending higher education courses at the university of Wales. Information as to numbers attending the university's constituent colleges is not collected centrally. In 1990-91 an estimated £220,000 was paid in fees-only mandatory awards to Irish undergraduate students attending the university of Wales.

THE ARTS

Cash Limits

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Minister for the Arts what proposals he has for changes to the cash and running costs limits for his Department's votes in 1991-92.

Mr. Renton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary spring supplementary estimates, the cash limits of the following votes will be changed as indicated:

Class and Vote	*Current cash limit* £	*Change* £	*Revised cash limit* £
XII.1	201,484,000	+339,000	201,823,000
XII.2	225,222,000	+4,070,000	229,292,000
XII.3	131,948,000	+1,000	131,949,000

Increased provision of £339,000 is being sought in a spring supplementary estimate on class XII, vote 1, to meet the additional costs to certain national museums and galleries of the payment of contributions in lieu of national non-domestic rates. The additional costs of £640,000 are being partly offset by savings of £301,000 elsewhere on the vote.

Provision is being sought on vote 2 for £500,000 to meet the initial costs of Government support for the European arts festival, 1992; and for £3,570,000 to augment the main estimate provision for assets accepted in lieu of tax. A token supplementary estimate of £1,000 will be presented in respect of vote 3 to secure parliamentary authority to the appropriation in aid in favour of the British library of part of the receipts form the sale of the library's premises at Store street.

The additional provision sought, £4,410,000, will be charged to the reserve and will therefore not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

CIVIL SERVICE

Cash Limits

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what proposals he has for changes to the 1991-92 cash limit for the office of the Minister for the Civil Service.

Mr. Renton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (class XIX, vote 1) will be increased by £217,000 from £41,721,000 to £41,938,000. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The increase is required to cover the cost of physical security improvements, refurbishment work in 10 Downing street and the cost of additional staff on outward secondment (this latter charge is offset by increased appropriations in aid). In addition appropriations in aid have been amended to take account of the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency becoming ineligible to claim VAT refunds on contracted out services. The Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency's capital provision has been reduced to reflect a reassessment of its capital equipment requirements.

Some of the changes in provision have a consequent effect on the Department's running costs limit which will be increased by £141,000 from £49,052,000 to £49,193,000.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Credits

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on how the youth training guarantee applies to young people in the areas covered by training credits.

Mr. Jackson: Training credits operate within the YT framework and the YT guarantee continues to apply.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library a copy of each review of the systems of training credits which have been piloted during the last year.

Mr. Jackson: We hope to issue a report in the spring on the results of the evaluation of the training credits pilot schemes during their first nine months of operation. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library a copy of each of the proposals to extend the system of training credits.

Mr. Jackson: No. The information contained in the proposals is commercial in confidence.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what evalution of training credits was conducted by his Department before 26 November 1991.

Mr. Jackson: At 26 November 1991, an interim study of the pilots had been completed by the training standards inspectorate in conjunction with the careers service inspectorate. External research in each pilot area had also been commissioned. We hope to publish evaluation results from the first nine months of operating training credits in the spring.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if it remains his policy that the terms and arrangements outlined in the White Paper, "Competing for Quality", should apply in respect of his Department's negotiations with the training and enterprise councils and the TECs' negotiations with local providers of training.

Mr. Jackson: The Department negotiates a performance based contract with TECs with quality and value for money very much in mind. Stretching but fair targets are set. Negotiations between TECs and their providers is a matter for the two parties concerned.

Earnings

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will show for full-time workers the percentage earning less than £180 and £190 giving the information for *(a)* women and *(b)* men, (1) manual, (2) non-manual and (3) all workers, including overtime pay and excluding overtime pay for (i) Scotland, (ii) the regions of Scotland and (iii) Great Britain;

(2) if he will show for full-time workers the percentage earning less than £130 and £140 per week giving the information for *(a)* women and *(b)* men, (1) manual, (2) non-manual and (3) all workers, including overtime pay and excluding overtime pay for (i) Scotland, (ii) the regions of Scotland and (iii) Great Britain.

Mr. Forth: The information available from the 1991 new earnings survey is given in the tables.

Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage with weekly earnings (excluding overtime) below the following specified amounts

	April 1991			
	£130	*£140*	*£180*	*£190*
Manual Women				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	—	—	—	—
Dumfries/Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	34·6	48·7	97·4	97·4
Grampian	56·7	68·7	88·1	92·5
Highland	—	—	—	—

	April 1991			
	£130	£140	£180	£190
Lothian	35·3	48·7	82·4	84·9
Strathclyde	38·6	48·1	77·2	82·3
Tayside	44·6	54·2	88·0	90·4
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	—	—	—	—
Scotland	42·1	52·8	83·3	87·3
Great Britain	38·3	48·3	78·3	82·6
Non-Manual Women				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	19·6	25·5	56·9	61·4
Dumfries/Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	16·3	20·2	48·3	51·7
Grampian	15·1	20·5	45·7	47·6
Highland	20·7	27·3	47·9	57·0
Lothian	10·6	15·8	43·7	48·2
Strathclyde	13·3	18·8	44·3	50·8
Tayside	13·5	17·6	42·3	46·8
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	20·1	26·8	45·0	53·0
Scotland	14·0	19·4	45·5	50·8
Great Britain	10·5	15·1	37·4	42·6
All Women				
Borders	34·1	43·5	71·8	75·3
Central	27·3	35·1	65·4	70·2
Dumfries/Galloway	33·0	39·4	67·0	73·4
Fife	21·9	28·9	63·3	65·6
Grampian	22·4	28·9	53·1	55·5
Highland	26·0	33·6	55·5	63·0
Lothian	14·2	20·5	49·2	53·4
Strathclyde	18·3	24·7	50·8	57·1
Tayside	20·9	26·3	53·1	57·1
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	25·8	33·0	52·2	59·3
Scotland	19·7	26·2	53·2	58·2
Great Britain	15·6	21·2	45·0	50·0

Source: New Earnings Survey.
Note: "—" denotes sample size too small or standard error too large for reliable estimate.

Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage with weekly earnings (including overtime) below the following specified amounts

	April 1991			
	£130	£140	£180	£190
Manual Women				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	—	—	—	—
Dumfries/Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	33·3	43·6	87·2	89·7
Grampian	55·2	67·2	83·6	89·6
Highland	—	—	—	—
Lothian	27·7	42·9	73·9	79·8
Strathclyde	35·9	43·5	69·3	75·0
Tayside	42·2	51·8	84·3	86·7
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	—	—	—	—
Scotland	39·2	48·1	75·9	80·7
Great Britain	34·7	43·5	72·4	77·1
Non-Manual Women				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	19·0	24·2	51·0	56·9
Dumfries/Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	12·9	18·0	44·4	48·9
Grampian	14·2	19·9	44·2	45·7
Highland	17·4	24·0	45·5	56·2
Lothian	9·5	14·4	40·5	45·8
Strathclyde	11·4	16·8	41·1	47·5
Tayside	12·7	16·5	41·9	45·7
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	17·4	24·2	42·3	51·7
Scotland	12·4	17·7	42·6	48·1
Great Britain	9·5	13·8	35·3	40·4
All Women				
Borders	31·8	40·0	69·4	74·1
Central	26·3	32·2	57·6	62·9
Dumfries/Galloway	31·9	35·1	64·9	71·3
Fife	19·1	25·8	57·4	61·3
Grampian	21·4	28·1	51·0	53·4
Highland	23·3	29·5	51·4	60·3
Lothian	12·1	18·5	45·3	50·7
Strathclyde	16·3	22·1	46·7	53·0
Tayside	19·7	24·9	52·0	55·4
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	23·6	29·7	48·4	56·6
Scotland	17·9	23·9	49·4	54·7
Great Britain	14·2	19·3	42·2	47·2

Source: New Earnings Survey.
Note: "—" denotes sample size too small or standard error too large for reliable estimate.

Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage with weekly earnings (excluding overtime) below the following specified amounts

	April 1991			
	£130	£140	£180	£190
Manual Men				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	5·8	11·6	31·9	41·5
Dumfries/Galloway	7·8	8·6	47·4	52·6
Fife	9·2	11·6	42·8	48·0
Grampian	8·8	13·1	34·9	40·4
Highland	6·1	16·0	48·9	55·0
Lothian	9·1	14·3	39·9	47·5
Strathclyde	9·6	13·5	37·9	45·5
Tayside	10·6	17·6	49·6	57·0
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	7·4	15·3	43·2	50·0
Scotland	9·2	13·7	39·4	46·6
Great Britain	7·0	10·8	33·1	39·7
Non-Manual Men				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	2·8	3·9	14·0	17·3
Dumfries/Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	4·6	8·0	13·7	14·9
Grampian	3·0	4·5	10·0	12·3
Highland	4·7	5·7	15·1	17·9
Lothian	4·6	5·9	15·6	17·9
Strathclyde	3·2	5·4	14·8	17·8
Tayside	4·9	7·9	16·9	19·5
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	4·5	6·0	13·4	15·7
Scotland	3·7	5·7	14·4	17·1
Great Britain	2·8	4·3	12·1	14·4
All Men				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	4·4	8·0	23·6	30·3
Dumfries/Galloway	6·6	7·7	36·6	40·4
Fife	7·3	10·1	30·8	34·4
Grampian	6·1	9·1	23·2	27·2
Highland	5·5	11·4	33·8	38·4
Lothian	6·5	9·5	26·0	30·6
Strathclyde	6·5	9·5	26·4	31·7
Tayside	7·8	12·9	33·8	38·8
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	6·1	11·3	30·3	35·2
Scotland	6·5	9·8	27·1	32·1
Great Britain	4·8	7·3	21·9	26·1

Source: New Earnings Survey.
Note: "—" denotes sample size too small or standard error too large for reliable estimate.

Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage with weekly earnings (including overtime) below the following specified amounts

	April 1991 £130	£140	£180	£190
Manual Men				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	3·9	5·8	20·8	27·5
Dumfries/Galloway	6·9	7·8	31·9	39·7
Fife	6·0	7·6	25·2	29·6
Grampian	6·0	8·0	22·1	25·5
Highland	4·6	9·2	34·4	40·5
Lothian	6·5	9·8	27·9	34·2
Strathclyde	7·3	9·6	24·9	30·3
Tayside	8·1	11·6	32·4	37·7
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	5·7	9·7	30·1	35·8
Scotland	6·8	9·3	26·0	31·4
Great Britain	4·9	3·9	22·0	26·9
Non-Manual Men				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	2·8	3·9	10·6	14·5
Dumfries/Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	4·0	6·9	13·1	14·9
Grampian	1·8	3·2	8·9	10·7
Highland	4·7	5·7	14·2	16·0
Lothian	4·0	4·8	13·6	15·4
Strathclyde	2·7	4·5	12·0	14·8
Tayside	3·7	6·0	13·5	16·9
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	3·7	5·2	12·7	14·2
Scotland	3·1	4·7	12·2	14·7
Great Britain	2·4	3·6	10·3	12·3
All Men				
Borders	—	—	—	—
Central	3·4	4·9	16·1	21·5
Dumfries/Galloway	6·0	7·1	26·8	32·2
Fife	5·2	7·3	20·2	23·5
Grampian	4·1	5·8	15·9	18·6
Highland	4·6	7·6	25·3	29·5
Lothian	5·1	6·9	19·8	23·5
Strathclyde	5·0	7·0	18·5	22·6
Tayside	6·0	8·9	23·2	27·6
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highland/Islands	4·8	7·7	22·6	26·5
Scotland	4·9	7·0	19·2	23·2
Great Britain	3·5	5·2	15·7	19·1

Source: New Earnings Survey.

Note: "—" denotes sample size too small or standard error too large for reliable estimate.

Employment Protection

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of contributions he has made under section 123 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978; and if he will state the extent to which in each case any deficit in funds was made good by his Department for each year since 1978.

Mr. Forth: The information is not available in the form requested. Total payments to occupational pension schemes under section 123 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 for each financial year to 1989-90, the latest available date, were as follows:

Year	*Expenditure (£000)*
1978-79	87
1979-80	247
1980-81	582
1981-82	386
1982-83	365
1983-84	287
1984-85	646
1985-86	289
1986-87	514
1987-88	929
1988-89	628
1989-90	525

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

13. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will next meet the president of the National Farmers Union to discuss the GATT negotiations.

Mr. Gummer: I am in regular contact with the president of the NFU to discuss all matters concerning agriculture, including the GATT round.

Fish Laboratories

14. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give a progress report on the new building programme for the MAFF fish laboratories in Weymouth.

Mr. Curry: Planning approval has been granted for the new fish diseases laboratory at Weymouth and consultants have produced the final sketch plan. Demolition of the existing buildings is expected to start in June this year and the new laboratory should be completed by the end of 1993.

Hill Farming

15. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the National Farmers Union about hill farming and the hill livestock compensatory allowance.

Mr. Gummer: My noble Friend the Minister of State met the National Farmers' Union on 23 October as part of the normal consultation procedures we have held with the NFU. I will report to the House about the operation of the hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme 1992 as soon as the review has been completed.

Potatoes

16. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the Potato Marketing Board to encourage more variety in species of potato grown in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: None. The Potato Marketing Board's latest planting survey showed that 131 varieties were grown commercially in Great Britain last year.

Food Safety

17. **Mr. Michael Morris:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review the implementation of the Food Safety Act 1990 with reference to the selling of out-of-date food in the retail trade.

Mr. Maclean: No Sir. It is already an offence under the Food Labelling Regulations 1984 for anyone to sell food bearing an expired "use by" date.

It is also an offence under the Food Safety Act 1990 to sell any food which is unfit for human consumption or which is not of the nature, substance or quality demanded by the purchaser, whether or not any date mark has expired.

Cetaceans

18. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new initiative he has to protect cetaceans.

Mr. Gummer: We remain very concerned to take measures to secure the conservation of cetaceans. Most recently, on 1 January 1992, we introduced a scheme for voluntary reporting by United Kingdom fishermen of all incidental catches of marine mammals, including cetaceans. The EC-wide limitation on drift net length we secured last October will also contribute to conservation of cetaceans.

River Pollution

19. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any further plans to combat the pollution of rivers by the agricultural industry.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Minister announced on 21 January that a pilot study would be drawn up to see if pollution could be reduced by the preparation and use by farmers of plans for the disposal of manure, slurry and other organic wastes. This will supplement existing measures to tackle river pollution from agriculture including new legislation setting minimum constructional standards for farm waste storage facilities, 50 per cent grant aid towards the cost of such facilities, an increased maximum fine available to magistrates for water pollution offences, free initial pollution advice by ADAS and a £2 million R and D programme.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his review of the environmentally sensitive area boundaries will be completed.

Mr. Gummer: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen), earlier today.

Job Losses

Mr. Haynes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many jobs have been lost in the farming industry since 1979.

Mr. Curry: The number of farmers and workers recorded in the June census of agricultural holdings were 740,000 in 1979 and 628,000 in 1991. The difference of 112,000 overestimates the number of jobs lost because of changes in the basis on which the data were collected.

Beef Producers

Sir John Farr: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new measures he is taking to improve returns to specialist beef producers.

Mr. Curry: In October, Ministers announced that some £74 million would be made available to specialist beef producers in 1991-92 through the suckler cow premium scheme. The hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme continues to provide assistance to producers of beef cattle in the less favoured areas. Beef producers could also be eligible for assistance under the new group marketing grant scheme which is currently being finalised and will be introduced in April.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has made in discussions on the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs Gorman).

Agricultural Land (Planning Applications)

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he takes to monitor local authority planning consent with regard to alternative uses for agricultural land.

Mr. Curry: This Department does not monitor planning consents. The Department of the Environment collects statistics from local planning authorities but these do not extend to identifying changes of use for agricultural land.

Animal Exports

26. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were exported live in the past 12 months; what was their estimated value; and if he will make a statement on the conditions under which they were exported.

Mr. Maclean: All animals exported from Great Britain for slaughter or further fattening must undergo pre-export rest and veterinary inspection at Government-approved lairages, before being loaded on to vehicles approved for the purpose.

A total of 1,186,702 animals were inspected and declared fit for transport during 1991.

Figures showing the value of these exports are not yet available.

25. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the implications of the MacSharry common agricultural policy reform proposals for the sheep industry.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer which I gave to my hon. friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West on 19 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *306*.

27. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he is next due to meet the president of the National Farmers Union to discuss the sheep sector.

Mr. Gummer: I will be meeting the president of the National Farmers Union on 18 February to discuss the sheep sector and other matters.

Mackerel

28. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the fishing industry about the future of the south-west mackerel box; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: On 28 November 1991 a regulation making the box permanent in the interests of conserving the western mackerel stock was adopted. The industry has frequently made clear to us that the south western mackerel box should be retained although some would like to see stricter controls on some fishing with small mesh nets within the box for species such as pilchards and horse mackerel whilst others seek some relaxation to permit a small quota of mackerel for local trawlers. There is at present no evidence to suggest the problem is sufficiently large to require a complete ban on small mesh nets. A small mackerel quota would need EC agreement even if we thought a case might be made.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received in the last 12 months regarding animal welfare; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Department has continued to receive a very large number of representatives on animal welfare. The Government attach great importance to this issue and will continue to press for the high standards in this country to be adopted throughout the European Community.

Cash Limits

Mr. Marland: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to make any changes to his Department's cash limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Gummer: Yes. The cash limit for class III, vote 4 (other agricultural and food services, support for the fishing industry, arterial drainage, flood and coast protection) will be reduced by £6,745,000 from £273,789,000 to £267,044,000. Within this limit expenditure will be reduced by £2,345,000 on agricultural schemes and by £1,400,000 on sea fishery support. These reductions reflect a predicted decrease in demand under these schemes. Expenditure on emergency and strategic food services will be reduced by £3,000,000 reflecting a reduction in the size of the emergency food stockpile.

The non-voted cash limit MAFF/LACAP (supplementary credit approvals for flood defence and coast protection) will be decreased by £2,000,000 from £16,594,000 to £14,594,000 reflecting a predicted reduction in local authority expenditure on flood defence capital works.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what monitoring he is undertaking of the benefits from set-aside for *(a)* diverse plant species, *(b)* butterflies and other invertebrates, *(c)* short-eared owls, hen harriers and other predatory birds and *(d)* foxes and other wild mammals; and when he expects to complete a proper scientific evaluation of the effect of set-aside on wildlife.

Mr. Curry: The Department is currently undertaking work on the environmental impact of set-aside, including a study of the changes in the botanical composition of fallowed set-aside land. Final results are expected in 1994. The study will also provide some information about the likely implications for wildlife and will be supported by a separate study of rabbit numbers on set-aside land.

We are considering the scope for further research into the benefits to wildlife and a number of other organisations are carrying out relevant work in this area. However the complex range of factors affecting wildlife populations and the need to measure changes over time, mean that a full scientific evaluation cannot be completed in the immediate future.

Recession

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the effects of the current recession on the agricultural industry.

Mr. Maclean: The support arrangements under the common agricultural policy have to a considerable extent insulated the agriculture industry from the direct effects of recession. Farmers have however benefited from the fall in interest rates over the past year and interest payments by the farming industry are expected to have fallen by 14 per cent. in 1991.

Farming and Fishing Enterprises

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements his Department has to assess the effect of proposals for regulations on small farming and fishing enterprises prior to implementation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food participates fully in the Government's deregulation initiative to ensure that the regulatory burden on the agriculture and fishing industries is kept under constant review and minimised wherever possible.

This process includes consultation at an early stage with industry, on both United Kingdom and European Community regulatory proposals through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's close working relationships with trade associations and other groups. A cost compliance assessment which evaluates the effect all legislative proposals will have on industry is also prepared prior to implementation.

Fish Conservation

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the recent agreement of EC fisheries Ministers for the conservation of fish stocks.

Mr. Curry: Further to my statement in the House on 20 December we have today issued a consultation paper to the industry seeking views on a range of proposals which could be taken unilaterally to improve conservation of the fish stocks of importance to us. The proposals include suggestion for action on a one-net rule, a United Kingdom minimum landing size for whiting, further action on square mesh panels and new measures on net geometry.

A copy of the consultation document is available in the Library of the House.

Salmonella

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if any pasteurisation plants have yet been granted approval to process eggs from salmonella infected flocks; and how many plants have applied to him for such approval.

Mr. Maclean: No applications have been received for the approval of plants to pasteurise eggs from salmonella infected flocks. Consequently no plants have been approved for this purpose.

Pollution, Fal Estuary

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether current levels of pollution are within current EC standards in the Fal estuary, Cornwall.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

The relevant EC standards are environmental quality objectives (EQOs) for mercury and cadmium. Compliance with EQOs is demonstrated by reference to annual averages. Although higher than normal concentrations of these substances have recently been recorded in parts of the Fal estuary it is not possible to say whether there has yet been a breach of the EQO.

HEALTH

Dried Fruit

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *54*, if he will list the scientific references which led the health education authority to conclude that dried fruits contain non-milk extrinsic sugars.

Mr. Dorrell: During the process of drying, the cells of fresh fruit lose integrity and undergo structural changes, thus converting their intrinsic sugars to an extrinsic form as defined by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy.

The scientific principles of these processes are well established and described in basic food technology text books.

Patients Charter

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his estimate of the total extra costs incurred in enforcing standards in the patients charter expressed separately;

(2) what extra money he intends to provide specifically for meeting target standards under the patients charter;

(3) what assessment he has made of the manpower implications of the patients charter for *(a)* the ambulance services arising from requirements for response times, *(b)* accident and emergency departments arising from waiting time limits for initial assessment requirements, *(c)* out-patient departments arising from waiting time requirements, *(d)* operating theatres arising from cancellations of operations requirements and *(e)* on staffing arising from the naming of health service personnel as responsible for individual patients.

Mr. Dorrell: The patients charter defines acceptable standards for existing services. Each standard is currently being met, within existing resources, by some health authorities. Enforcement of charter standards will help to generalise this good management practice throughout the National Health Service.

Medical Professions (Work Load)

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been conducted, or are under way, into the administrative work loads of doctors, nurses and clinical staff in the professions associated with medicine; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no studies either completed or under way that specifically address the question of administrative work loads of doctors, nurses or professions allied to medicine.

The studies listed on the general work load of general medical practitioners (GMPs) and nurses have helped inform the Department of the administrative functions carried out by these groups.

1. The "Unnecessary Bureaucracy Working Group" which made recommendations on streamlining the administrative work of GMPs.
2. A cyclical study, in conjunction with the BMA, on the workload of GMPs. The last study was completed in 1989-90 and the next is scheduled to start in 1993-94.
3. A recently completed study by York university into nursing care which suggests that a small amount of time spent by nurses on administrative work can be beneficial to the quality of nursing care.
4. A survey to be commissioned shortly by the Department will address, among other things, the effects of using administrative support in relation to nursing.

Medical and Nursing Posts

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by staff grade and specialty, the number of full-time equivalent medical and nursing posts available to health service hospitals in 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information for 1991 is not yet available and 1990 data are shown in the tables. Information for 1976, 1981 and 1986 can be found in the publication "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for England" copies of which are available in the Library.

Table 1
Hospital Medical Staff: Analysis by specialty and grade
England—30 September 1990

Grade	*All staff*	*Consultant*	*Staff grade*	*Associate specialist*	*Senior registrar*	*Registrar*	*Senior house officer*	*House officer*	*Other*	*Hospital practitioner*	*Clinical assistant*
All medical specialities	39,760·8	13,897·3	239·7	717·1	3,143·9	5,934·8	10,692·5	3,016·0	10·8	186·9	1,921·6
General Medicine[1]	4, 643·4	1,155·7	3·5	14·0	239·2	628·7	1,145·7	1,283·3	0·8	20·8	151·7
Cardiology	437·4	132·8	0·0	2·4	42·8	114·7	103·7	23·0	1·0	2·2	14·8
Diabetes and Endocrinology[2]	85·9	17·2	0·9	1·1	14·2	21·5	14·0	5·0	0·0	1·6	10·4
Gastroenterology	138·5	33·6	1·0	0·0	11·3	44·1	18·1	21·0	0·0	1·5	7·9
Nephrology	218·8	59·3	3·5	4·8	15·0	45·9	72·9	10·0	0·0	0·8	6·6
Palliative Medicine[3]	25·9	13·1	0·0	0·0	1·5	0·5	7·0	0·0	0·0	0·7	3·1
Thoracic Medicine[4]	283·8	83·7	0·0	13·1	26·6	47·3	81·7	13·0	0·0	2·7	15·7
Geriatric Medicine	1,897·0	483·9	18·5	42·4	81·6	183·3	776·8	103·2	1·0	33·4	172·9
Audiological Medicine	15·2	10·9	0·0	0·0	4·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·3
Clinical Genetics[5]	47·4	29·3	0·0	1·5	7·2	6·1	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·5	2·8
Clinical Neuro. Phys.	61·8	49·8	0·0	1·0	7·0	0·0	3·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·0
Clinical Pharm. and Thera.	59·6	24·9	0·0	0·0	9·6	16·1	3·0	1·0	0·0	0·0	5·0
Clinical Physiology	15·7	11·9	0·0	0·0	0·5	2·0	1·0	0·0	0·0	0·1	0·2
Clinical Immun. and Aller.[6]	2·7	1·5	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·2	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Rehabilitation[7]	17·6	8·8	0·0	0·0	3·6	1·0	3·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·2
Dermatology	431·8	223·1	0·4	7·5	49·1	39·4	40·2	4·0	0·5	9·3	58·3
Genito-Urinary Medicine	335·9	157·9	3·9	8·1	37·9	42·3	27·6	0·7	0·8	5·7	51·0
Medical Oncology	69·5	23·2	0·0	0·0	9·9	13·1	15·8	3·0	0·0	0·3	4·2
Infectious Diseases	76·4	26·8	0·0	1·0	7·5	10·6	28·0	1·0	0·0	0·0	1·5
Neurology	376·0	167·1	0·0	1·3	36·9	57·1	89·3	13·0	0·0	1·2	10·1
Occupational Health[8]	62·9	27·2	1·0	0·0	5·6	2·7	1·0	0·0	0·0	1·2	24·2
Rheumatology[1]	470·5	221·9	3·9	10·6	48·5	36·2	94·9	17·0	0·0	5·6	31·9
Other	189·1	28·1	2·6	2·1	10·2	34·4	40·2	6·0	0·0	4·7	60·8
Paediatrics	2,316·3	684·8	4·0	6·5	134·5	329·8	1,112·9	6·0	0·0	3·8	34·0
Paediatric Neurology[9]	22·8	9·5	0·0	1·7	2·0	1·0	8·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·6
Accident and Emergency	1,886·4	196·4	41·6	62·1	54·6	78·2	1,262·2	6·0	0·0	5·9	179·4
General Surgery	3,522·8	879·3	9·0	13·2	162·8	570·7	646·1	1,192·5	0·0	9·7	39·5
Cardio-Thoracic Surgery	352·5	116·0	0·0	4·0	30·0	95·6	96·0	9·0	0·0	0·0	1·9
Otolaryngology[10]	943·3	352·8	5·9	24·6	63·4	138·9	282·1	35·0	0·0	7·4	33·2
Neurosurgery	246·1	86·8	0·0	0·0	24·4	53·3	73·0	8·0	0·0	0·0	0·6
Ophthalmology	1,155·7	407·5	14·7	52·3	78·8	122·0	338·9	1·0	3·4	6·4	130·7
Paediatric Surgery	127·6	35·6	0·0	0·0	16·2	22·5	49·0	4·0	0·0	0·0	0·3
Plastic Surgery	258·8	93·4	2·8	1·0	22·0	49·2	84·0	1·0	0·0	1·1	4·3
Traumatic & Ortho. Surgery	2,199·2	696·8	17·8	59·5	145·0	386·9	685·5	149·3	0·0	7·7	50·7
Urology	500·2	205·7	0·0	2·8	48·2	82·1	90·8	63·0	0·0	1·1	6·5
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	2,814·9	736·4	11·0	38·1	135·5	510·3	1,251·2	5·0	0·2	10·6	116·6
Anaesthetics	4,497·4	1,986·3	31·9	125·2	378·2	821·7	971·7	2·0	1·5	16·5	162·4
Radiology	1,552·4	1,054·5	1·3	4·5	250·1	225·2	4·5	0·0	0·0	1·0	11·3
Nuclear Medicine	38·1	21·9	0·0	1·5	6·0	4·5	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·1	2·1
Radiotherapy	451·4	181·8	2·8	6·0	59·5	76·5	98·2	15·0	0·0	0·8	10·8
General Pathology	49·5	0·0	0·0	2·5	0·0	12·0	31·7	0·0	0·0	0·5	2·8
Blood Transfusion	97·0	32·3	2·9	20·7	3·5	1·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	36·6
Chemical Pathology	263·1	157·6	1·0	2·3	55·3	32·4	13·0	0·0	0·0	0·1	1·4
Haematology	632·4	334·2	6·9	7·5	101·5	83·6	63·5	13·0	0·0	1·3	20·9
Histopathology	839·6	541·7	0·0	6·7	135·3	107·2	40·2	0·0	1·0	0·0	7·5
Immuno-Pathology	44·8	25·2	0·0	0·0	10·2	5·0	3·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·4
Medical Microbiology	388·8	239·3	0·0	2·1	72·6	54·6	17·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	3·2
Virology[11]	13·1	4·3	0·0	0·0	5·0	1·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	2·8
Neuropathology	38·1	25·5	0·0	0·0	9·9	1·0	1·0	0·0	0·0	0·2	0·5
Clinical Cytogenetics[12]	4·8	3·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·8
Mental Illness	3,359·8	1,095·5	39·2	124·7	292·8	642·2	861·1	22·0	0·0	11·1	291·2
Child and Adol. Psychiatry	478·1	326·5	0·0	3·2	91·9	24·6	13·1	0·0	0·6	1·3	16·9
Forensic Psychiatry	103·8	68·4	1·0	5·0	16·3	11·0	1·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·1
Mental Handicap	373·7	159·4	4·0	21·7	42·8	30·7	10·0	0·0	0·0	7·1	98·0
Old Age Psychiatry[13]	103·3	79·4	2·9	4·0	2·0	4·0	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·5	8·5
Psychotherapy	122·5	67·7	0·0	2·7	24·1	8·0	13·0	0·0	0·0	0·5	6·5

Notes:

[1] In 1982 specialty of Rheumatology replaced Rheumatology and rehabilitation: Rehabilitation became a sub-specialty of General medicine.

[2] In 1987 specialty of Endocrinology renamed Diabetes and endocrinology.

[3] New specialty introduced in 1989.
[4] In 1984 specialty of Diseases of chest renamed Thoracic medicine.
[5] New specialty introduced in 1979. Prior to 1979 staff in this specialty would usually have been included under "other".
[6] New specialty introduced in 1990.
[7] New specialty introduced in 1990.
[8] New specialty introduced in 1983. Prior to 1983 staff in this specialty would usually have been included under "other".
[9] New specialty introduced in 1980. Prior to 1980 staff in this specialty were included under Paediatrics.
[10] In 1985 specialty of Ear nose and throat renamed Otolaryngology.
[11] New specialty introduced in 1989.
[12] New specialty introduced in 1989.
[13] New specialty introduced in 1989.

Hospital based Nursing and Midwifery[1] staff in post at 30 September 1990
England

	Whole-time equivalent[2]
Hospital Nursing Staff	328,060
Qualified	188,770
Senior Nurses 1-5	570
Senior Nurses 6-8[3]	—
Tutorial Nurses	5,240
Other Registered	131,410
Enrolled Nurses	51,550
Learners:	
Post-Registered Student Nurses	1,640
Post-Enrolled Student Nurses	1,850
Pre-Registered Student Nurses	46,550
Pupil Nurses	2,470
Unqualified	86,790
Hospital Midwifery Staff	19,490
Qualified	15,660
Senior Nurses 1-5	40
Senior Nurses 6-8[3]	—
Tutorial Midwifery Staff	660
Other State Certified Midwives	14,960
Learners: Student Midwifery	3,820

Source: Department of Health (SM13) annual census of National Health Service non-medical manpower.

[1] Excludes agency staff.

[2] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents.

[3] It is no longer appropriate to separate registered nurses between senior nurse 6 to 8 and other registered nurses.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements for transfer of dowry funds with resettled mental handicap patients to local authorities have been made in each regional health authority; under what terms these payments are made; and if he will list by regional health authority the sums transferred each year on this basis.

Mr. Dorrell: Payments of dowries are made under section 28A of the National Health Service Act 1977. Guidance on such payments was given to regional health authorities in HC(83)6, HC(84)9 and HC(86)11, copies of which are available in the Library. Information on dowry payments in respect of patients resettled from mental handicap hospitals is not available in the form requested. Total health authority dowry payments to local authorities for people with learning disabilities were £6.647 million in 1988-89 and £12.283 million in 1989-90.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number, for each regional health authority, of in-patient residents in health service facilities for patients with a mental handicap for each year since 1981; and what proportion of the reduction in numbers is due to discharge and what proportion due to death, for each regional health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The table shows the number of patients with learning disabilities resident in national health service hospitals and units by regional health authority. It is not possible to calculate the proportions of the reduction due to discharge and deaths as the data on admissions and discharges collected centrally do not relate to individual patients.

	31 December 1981	*31 December 1982*	*31 December 1983*	*31 December 1984*	*31 December 1985*	*31 December 1986*	*31 March 1988*	*31 March 1989*	*31 March 1990*	*31 March 1991*
Northern	3,022	2,938	2,859	2,681	2,568	2,478	n/a	n/a	2,077	1,957
Yorkshire Trent	2,966	2,887	2,773	2,699	2,567	2,355	n/a	n/a	1,980	1,313
Trent	4,028	3,882	3,777	3,419	3,122	2,820	n/a	n/a	2,347	1,760
East Anglian	1,478	1,458	1,375	1,267	1,184	1,075	n/a	n/a	893	906
North West Thames	3,413	3,297	3,285	3,085	2,934	2,888	n/a	n/a	2,496	2,467
North East Thames	2,447	2,377	2,318	2,119	1,909	1,786	n/a	n/a	1,274	1,274
South East Thames	2,877	2,743	2,596	2,418	2,123	1,843	n/a	n/a	840	1,077
South West Thames	5,402	5,229	5,030	4,783	4,493	4,069	n/a	n/a	2,948	2,704
Wessex	2,892	2,037	1,932	1,434	1,432	1,318	n/a	n/a	1,214	1,116
Oxford	1,677	1,636	1,582	1,403	1,383	1,266	n/a	n/a	853	843
South Western	4,164	4,049	3,896	3,184	2021	2,523	n/a	n/a	2,314	1,495
West Midlands	3,839	3,726	3,632	3,342	3,179	2,980	n/a	n/a	2,555	2,535
Mersey	2,158	2,082	1,952	1,828	1,729	1,568	n/a	n/a	1,115	921
North Western	3,538	3,391	3,256	3,022	2,813	2,576	n/a	n/a	2,003	1,729
ENGLAND	43,091	41,712	40,183	36,674	34,239	31,461	n/a	27,700	24,909	22,117

Source:
SKIDC
KHE for 1981-1986
HES for 1987-88 onwards
n/a = not readily available

Triazolam

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of adverse drug reaction reports, through the yellow card system for each year from 1978 to 1991 for Triazolam; and how many of these were categorised as serious.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There have been 402 reports, of which 173 were categorised as serious. The number of reports by year is as follows:

Year of report	*Total reports*	*Serious reports*
1978	0	0
1979	50	20
1980	51	24
1981	48	12
1982	87	42
1983	41	20
1984	20	11
1985	19	4
1986	17	3
1987	21	13
1988	13	7
1989	7	3
1990	6	0
1991	22	14

Computerised Equipment

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many computerised tomography scanners and magnetic resonance machines are at present available to the national health service that were bought from *(a)* national health service funds and *(b)* charitable appeals.

Mr. Dorrell: There are 250 computerised tomography scanners and 30 magnetic resonance machines in use on national health service sites in the United Kingdom. Available information suggests that private donations or appeals helped towards the funding of purchase in approximately half these cases.

Dementia and Arthritis

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why it was decided not to include dementia and arthritis as key areas for action in his "Health of the Nation" report; and whether he proposes to ask public health directors to report on the demand for services for dementia and arthritis sufferers in their assessments of health needs.

Mr. Dorrell: Dementia and arthritis were not discussed and proposed in "The Health of the Nation" as areas in which health targets might be set because despite their importance they did not meet the proposed criteria for selection set out in the Green Paper. Directors of public health are already required to assess the health needs of the local population to inform their local health authority's decisions about the provision of services, including those for people suffering from dementia and arthritis. Progress in meeting needs is included in public health directors' reports to their regional health authorities and to the Department.

Cash Limits

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he proposes to make to the cash limits for the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XIII, vote 6 (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys) will be increased by £263,000 from £95,807,000 to £96,070,000. This reflects an increase in running costs provision of £263,000 in respect of the end year flexibility arrangements for running costs expenditure (the increase of public expenditure will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planning total). Increases of £250,000 in the National Health Service central register area to reduce the backlog of transactions arising from computerisation of the national health service central register earlier this year: and £66,000 for additional and continuing work on medical statistics, and an increase in capital provision of £20,000 for work on morbidity will be matched by an increase in appropriations in aid on the OPCS vote. These latter amounts will be met from within the existing resources of the Department of Health (class XIII, vote 3).

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he proposes to make to the cash limits and running cost limit of his Department in 1991-92.

Mr. Waldegrave: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limits for class XIII vote 1 (Hospital, community health, family health services (part) and related services, England) will be decreased by £21,861,000 (from £16,520,699,000 to £16,498,838,000). This decrease allows for transfers to class XIII, vote 4 of £12,480,000 reflecting an increase in the NHS trusts' aggregate external financing limit and £8,214,000 following reapportionment of drug budgets; to class XIII, vote 3 of £2,000,000 for publicity in respect of deaths in infancy; £96,000 for the inquiry into still births and £24,000 for computer audit equipment; and to class XVI, vote 8 of £38,000 for the Cardiff school of occupational therapy. These reductions are partly offset by transfers from class XIII, vote 3 of £640,000 for valuation office services, £152,000 for inspection by the Medicines Control Agency; £128,000 for training purposes and £71,000 for the national external quality assessment scheme.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 3 (Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England) will be decreased by £1,716,000 (from £733,429,000 to £731,713,000). This reduction allows for transfers to class XIV, vote 4 of £819,000 for accommodation of the artificial eye service; to class XIII, vote 1 totalling £991,000 as mentioned above; to class XVIII, vote 1 of £65,000 for Chessington computer centre and to class XVI, vote 7 of £11,000 for inspections by the Medicines Control Agency. Savings totalling £2,000,000 are also made from departmental administration capital. These decreases are partly offset by transfers from class XIII, vote 1 of £2,120,000 as mentioned above; and from class XIV, vote 4 of £90,000 for the Departmental Records Office.

The provision for running costs on class XIII, vote 3 and the Department's running cost limit is decreased by £15,000 from £252,921,000 to £252,906,000.

North West Thames Regional Health Authority

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that there has been proper management of the finance and payroll computer systems in the North West Thames regional health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: All national health service finance and payroll systems are subject to statutory external audit.

Free Prescriptions

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend the list of illnesses qualifying for free prescriptions to include (a) cancer sufferers taking Tamoxifen and (b) other illnesses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Exemption from prescription charges on medical grounds is linked to specified medical conditions, rather than to particular treatments. There are no plans to change this policy or to extend the list of medical conditions which currently attract free prescriptions.

Existing, wide-ranging exemption arrangements, underpinned by the separate scheme for remission on grounds of low income and the prescription prepayment certificate scheme, ensure that no one need forego any necessary medication on financial grounds. Less than one item in five dispensed in the national health service currently attracts a charge.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will issue a clear exposition on the levels of service which can be expected by recipients of personal social services;

(2) what is his policy with regard to the principle of equity of access to personal social services;

(3) what steps he takes to measure outcomes in the provision of personal social services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for local authorities to determine the appropriate level of services based on their judgment of local needs and priorities and on available resources, and to monitor implementation. Their published community care plans should make clear the level of services they expect to provide.

The Department is committed to funding longer term research to evaluate the new community care arrangements, including the assessment of outcomes for users and carers.

The standard spending assessment for personal social services represents the Government's view of the appropriate level of spending required to achieve a standard level of service, and thus ensures that the Government's contribution to local government is targeted on areas with greatest need.

Community Nurses

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on charging for community health nurse services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: National health service community health services are provided free of charge.

Cook-Chill Catering

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation has been undertaken into the value for money of expenditure by district health authorities on cook-chill catering units.

Mr. Dorrell: It is the responsibility of individual health authorities to assess and evaluate proposals for the introduction of cook-chill catering locally. They are also expected to evaluate a unit's performance against agreed standards as an integral part of the process of assessing value for money within the national health service.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he is monitoring the local implementation of the Children Act 1989 and National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 against local authorities' own definitions of need or a national notional norm; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has been discussing with the local authority associations and voluntary child care organisations how best to monitor implementation of the Children Act in respect of services to children in need as defined by section 17(10) of the Children Act. This will form part of the Department's strategy for monitoring implementation of the Children Act overall. The implementation of "Caring for People" is being monitored by regional health authorities and the regional social services inspectorate on the basis of the progress review issues document issued in June 1991.

National Health Service Trusts (Purchasing)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what directions have been given to trusts with regard to central purchasing arrangements;

(2) what proposals he has to restructure central purchasing arrangements within the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: The National Health Service Supplies Authority was established as a special health authority on 1 October 1991 to provide a comprehensive national supplies service for all national health service units throughout England. Over the next few months it will take over the supplies services currently provided by regional and district health authorities and will operate through a central headquarters and six operating divisions. All national health service units including trusts, will be encouraged to negotiate a service contract with the appropriate division of the authority for the range of supplies services each will require, in expectation of securing best value for money. Trusts will be free to manage their own supplies service but would be expected to demonstrate continuing value for money if they choose to do so.

Elderly People (Nursing Care)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of the national health service in providing long-term nursing care of the elderly, and on the circumstances under which private nursing care or private, voluntary or local authority residential care should be used; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The role of the national health service in providing long-term nursing care is clearly set out in the White Paper "Caring for People" (Cm. 849) at paragraphs 4.19-4.22. Health authorities may make use of private nursing homes or nursing services as they see fit in the light of local circumstances and priorities and available resources. Similarly, it is for local authorities to decide whether to provide accommodation in their own homes or to arrange residential care in the independent sector for those who are in need of residential care.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service patients over retirement age have been discharged directly into *(a)* private nursing homes, *(b)* voluntary nursing homes, *(c)* private care homes, *(d)* voluntary care homes and *(e)* local authority part III accommodation for each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

Health and Social Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that there is consistency between the statistical information available nationally for planning both health care and social care.

Mr. Dorrell: A wide range of information supports the Department's planning, including demographic and census statistics as well as data relating to the NHS and local authority social services. The need for consistency is well established as a key consideration in the design of national collection systems. Mechanisms exist to formulate consistent central information requirements in both health and social services.

Home Helps

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the prevalence of local authorities redefining their criteria for access to home help/home care services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. We understand that some local authorities have revised their criteria.

Care Budget

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account will be taken of geographical variations when the care element of the social security budget for private and voluntary residential nursing care is transferred to local authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Decisions about the distribution of the transfer from the Department of Social Security to individual local authorities will be taken later this year following discussions with the local authority associations.

Westwood Hospital

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has about the plans to build a 50-bed bungalow-type hospital in the grounds of Westwood hospital.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* There are no such plans. I understand that Bradford health authority is consulting Bradford community health council about its plans for the development of local services for people with learning disabilities.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what analysis he has received of local opinion on the proposal to close Westwood hospital in Bradford; if he will summarise the opinion; and if he will place copies of the analysis in the Library.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* We have received no analysis of local opinion regarding the closure of Westwood hospital.

Bradford health authority is currently consulting Bradford community health council about its plans for developing services for people with learning disabilities.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Bradford Health announced its proposal to close Westwood hospital in Bradford; over what period the local community was consulted about the proposal; what consideration he has given to the proposal; and when he intends to announce whether he approves the closure proposal.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* Bradford health authority conducted a full public consultation between August and November 1990 on their proposals for the development of services for people with learning disabilities including the future role of Westwood hospital. These proposals have not been referred to Ministers.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake to visit Westwood hospital, Bradford, to meet the local community before reaching a decision on the future of the hospital.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* No such proposal has been referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for a decision.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public consultation has been conducted in Bradford over the proposal to close Westwood hospital; and what representations he has received about the consultation process.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* Bradford health conducted a full public consultation between August and November 1990 on its proposals for the development of services for people with learning disabilities including the future role of Westwood hospital. They are now consulting Bradford community health council for the next phase of these plans. We have received a number of representations about Westwood hospital from the hon. Members for Bradford, West and for Bradford, South (Mr Cryer) and a number of local residents.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will describe the normal procedure applied to any proposal to close a hospital; and the circumstances in which he is required to approve a proposal to close a hospital; and whether this normal procedure has been applied to the proposal by Bradford Health to close Westwood hospital.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 28 January 1992]*: The procedure for the closure of hospitals is contained in the Community Health Councils Regulations 1985 (as amended). The regulations provide for formal local consultation, including the appropriate community health council, (CHC) for any significant change in hospital and community health services. If local agreement cannot be achieved, the proposals must be referred to the regional health authority who may reject them or forward them for consideration by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. In the case of services for people with learning disabilities, Bradford health authority has confirmed that it will consult with the CHC and other interested parties on its proposals including final closure and disposal of the hospital.

SCOTLAND

Health Service Staff

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, by staff grade and specialty, the number of full-time equivalent medical and nursing posts available to health service hospitals in 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not available in the form requested. Data on the number (whole time equivalent) of hospital doctors and nurses in post in 1976, 1981 and 1986 are, however, contained in the appropriate editions of "Scottish Health Statistics"[1], copies of which are available in the Library.

Provisional figures for September 1991 are shown in the tables.

[1] Scottish health statistics:
1976: tables 9.5 and 9.10-9.14
1981: tables 9.10 and 9.12
1986: tables 9.8 and 9.12

Notes:

1. Consultants and associate specialists holding maximum part-time contracts are counted as 1.0 WTE (except in 1976 tables).
2. The standard working week for nurses changed from 40 to 37·5 hours in 1980.

Table 1

Hospital medical and dental staff: by grade[1] and speciality at 30 September 1991 (provisional)

Whole time equivalent

Speciality	*Total WTE*	*Cons*	*ASSP*	*Staff grade*	*Senior REG*	*REG*	*SHO*	*House OFF*
All specialties	5,705·1	2,159·6	151·4	30·8	381·8	977·5	1,395·0	611·0
Surgical specialties	1,362·9	448·5	40·1	2·6	67·8	262·8	256·1	285·0
Cardiothoracic surgery	42·1	16·1	0·0	0·0	1·0	8·0	14·0	3·0
ENT surgery	124·9	49·3	6·0	2·0	7·0	30·6	29·0	1·0
General surgery	603·5	149·0	9·5	0·0	20·8	99·6	92·1	235·5
Neurosurgery	34·4	13·2	0·0	0·0	2·0	7·2	8·0	4·0
Opthalmology	144·6	65·6	10·8	0·6	10·0	30·6	27·0	0·0
Orthopaedics	281·5	102·1	12·8	0·0	17·0	63·6	61·0	25·0
Plastic surgery	39·5	12·0	0·0	0·0	3·0	11·0	9·0	4·5
Surgical Paediatrics	32·9	8·9	0·0	0·0	2·0	5·0	9·0	8·0
Urology	59·5	32·3	1·0	0·0	5·0	11·2	6·0	4·0
Accident and emergency	205·3	21·0	3·0	2·7	6·6	8·0	164·0	0·0
Anaesthetics	581·3	295·9	17·5	3·0	43·7	97·0	124·2	0·0
Medical specialties	1,723·1	547·7	21·0	6·2	97·8	266·8	489·6	294·0
Communicable diseases	47·9	17·0	1·3	1·6	2·0	5·0	16·0	5·0
Dermatology	76·4	33·1	3·5	0·6	8·4	13·8	17·0	0·0
Cardiology	45·3	18·9	0·0	0·0	0·6	17·8	8·0	0·0
Clinical pharmacy and therapeutics	13·9	8·3	0·0	0·0	1·8	1·8	2·0	0·0
Endocrin and diabetes	8·7	5·0	0·8	0·0	0·4	1·5	0·0	1·0
Gastro-enterology	19·3	4·6	0·0	0·0	2·0	8·7	2·0	2·0
General medicine	740·7	176·6	1·5	0·0	34·2	88·6	173·8	266·0
Homeopathy	4·0	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	2·0	0·0
Medical oncology	18·1	10·1	0·0	0·0	2·6	3·4	2·0	0·0
Nephrology	28·2	10·6	0·0	1·0	0·0	9·0	7·6	0·0
Rheumatology	26·1	10·9	0·0	0·0	1·5	7·7	3·0	3·0
Genito-urinary medicine	23·0	12·0	2·0	0·0	5·0	3·0	1·0	0·0
Geriatric medicine	221·3	80·8	7·7	1·0	13·2	20·0	95·6	3·0
Medical paediatrics	265·0	73·4	2·0	0·0	13·5	53·5	122·6	0·0
Neurology	34·5	18·5	0·0	0·0	3·0	9·0	4·0	0·0
Palliative medicine	6·0	1·3	0·7	0·0	1·0	0·0	3·0	0·0
Radiotherapy	55·5	28·5	0·0	0·0	3·0	9·0	15·0	0·0
Rehabilitation medicine	16·1	6·6	1·5	1·0	2·0	2·0	3·0	0·0
Respiratory medicine	73·1	29·5	0·0	1·0	3·6	13·0	12·0	14·0
Dental specialties	184·3	65·1	16·3	2·0	14·4	36·5	18·0	32·0
Oral surgery	71·4	19·6	10·2	0·0	5·2	14·4	15·0	7·0
Oral medicine	9·9	4·5	0·0	0·0	0·0	4·4	0·0	1·0
Orthodontics	38·2	29·7	1·0	2·0	3·0	5·0	0·0	4·5
Paediatric dentistry	11·1	2·9	1·5	0·0	0·6	1·6	1·0	3·5
Restorative dentistry	53·7	15·4	3·6	0·0	5·6	11·1	2·0	16·0

Speciality	*Total WTE*	*Cons*	*ASSP*	*Staff grade*	*Senior REG*	*REG*	*SHO*	*House OFF*
Obstetrics and gynaecology	413·8	123·7	6·1	2·0	22·1	87·9	172·0	0·0
Psychiatric specialties	608·2	268·3	24·5	8·5	50·3	108·1	148·5	0·0
Child and Ad psychiatry	48·6	36·4	0·5	0·0	8·2	3·5	0·0	0·0
Forensic psychiatry	10·9	9·9	1·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Mental handicap	23·6	13·0	5·6	1·0	3·0	0·0	1·0	0·0
General psychiatry	504·3	194·8	17·4	7·5	36·5	103·6	144·5	0·0
Psychotherapy	12·0	8·4	0·0	0·0	1·6	1·0	1·0	0·0
Old age psychiatry	8·8	5·8	0·0	0·0	1·0	0·0	2·0	0·0
Laboratory and support specialties	617·4	380·6	22·9	3·8	78·1	110·4	21·6	0·0
Blood transfusion	27·0	12·2	7·0	1·8	1·0	5·0	0·0	0·0
Clinical chemistry	43·3	25·5	1·8	0·0	9·0	5·0	2·0	0·0
Clinical genetics	12·8	4·2	1·0	0·0	3·2	4·4	0·0	0·0
Haematology	85·8	43·8	5·0	0·0	7·1	20·3	9·6	0·0
Immunology	3·2	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·6	0·6	1·0	0·0
Microbiology	66·9	45·2	0·5	2·0	8·6	9·6	1·0	0·0
Nuclear medicine	2·0	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Pathology	151·1	95·3	7·3	0·0	20·4	20·1	8·0	0·0
Diagnostic radiology	214·6	147·9	0·3	0·0	22·0	44·4	0·0	0·0
Virology	10·7	4·5	0·0	0·0	5·2	1·0	0·0	0·0
Occupational health	10·8	8·8	0·0	0·0	1·0	0·0	1·0	0·0

[1] Includes honorary appointments.
Excludes the grades SHMO, SMDO, Limited Specialist, Hosp Practitioner and Para 94/107 appointments.

Table 2: Hospital nursing staff: by qualification status, grade and field of employment: at 30 September 1991 (provisional)

Whole-time equivalent

	Total	*Administration*	*Acute*	*Midwifery*	*Mental illness*	*Mental handicap*	*Care of elderly*	*Paediatric*
All hospital nursing staff	56,196·7	10·0	25,341·3	4,191·6	11,744·8	3,863·9	9,425·4	1,619·7
Qualified	29,879·6	10·0	13,531·4	2,670·6	6,200·4	1,629·7	4,846·6	990·9
Management	132·8	10·0	106·8	1·0	11·0	4·0	0·0	0·0
Director of nursing services	5·0	0·0	1·0	1·0	2·0	1·0	0·0	0·0
Senior nurse manager—level I	23·0	0·0	23·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Senior nurse manager—other	77·8	0·0	77·8	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Protected grades	25·0	10·0	5·0	0·0	7·0	3·0	0·0	0·0
Other	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Clinical grades	29,746·8	0·0	13,424·6	2,669·6	6,189·4	1,625·7	4,846·6	990·9
Scale I	401·4	0·0	174·5	44·0	88·9	29·0	51·0	14·0
Scale H	507·7	0·0	258·3	59·9	84·7	26·0	58·9	19·9
Scale G	4,058·3	0·0	1,786·5	557·0	785·2	223·4	596·0	110·2
Scale F	2,649·5	0·0	906·9	736·2	453·3	132·3	322·3	98·5
Scale E	11,047·8	0·0	5,289·6	1,168·5	2,138·1	506·3	1,433·5	511·8
Scale D	8,360·7	0·0	3,658·7	49·7	2,203·2	644·1	1,625·9	179·1
Scale C	2,719·4	0·0	1,350·1	54·3	434·0	64·6	759·0	57·4
Other	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
In training	9,899·7	0·0	7,101·7	656·0	1,514·3	390·7	0·0	237·0
Student midwife	656·0	0·0	0·0	656·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Student nurse	9,007·7	0·0	6,867·7	0·0	1,512·3	390·7	0·0	237·0
Pupil nurse	236·0	0·0	234·0	0·0	2·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Unqualified	16,417·4	0·0	4,708·2	865·0	4,030·1	1,843·5	4,578·8	391·8
Auxiliary nurse C	9·0	0·0	0·0	2·6	4·0	0·0	2·4	0·0
Auxiliary nurse B	921·6	0·0	96·8	7·1	293·0	428·7	71·6	24·4
Auxiliary nurse A	15,252·6	0·0	4,611·4	741·8	3,733·1	1,403·4	4,504·8	258·1
Nursery nurse	234·2	0·0	0·0	113·5	0·0	11·4	0·0	109·3

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sales of capital assets have arisen from closures of mental handicap hospitals; and if he will list the assets disposed of and the money raised by each sale.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested, for the period since the 1974 reorganisation of the health service, is given in the table:

Health board	*Hospital*	*Assets disposed of*	*Date of disposal*	*Proceeds from disposals (£)*
Argyll and Clyde	Caldwell Hospital, Uplawmoor	Hospital property	1989	180,000·00
	Broadfield Hospital, Port Glasgow	Hospital property	1988	459,845·00
Fife	Glenlomond Hospital, by Kinross	Glenlomond Hospital Farm	1985	83,442·12
		House at Glenlomond Farm	1986	9,400·00
		Glenlomond Hospital property	1988	325,555·00
Tayside	Murthly Hospital	Hospital property	1988	359,695·60
	Strathmartine Craigmill House	Craigmill House property	1990	66,551·09

Individual health boards are able to retain proceeds from the disposals they achieve—currently at the rate of 80 per cent. with the balance being allocated by the management executive to benefit the NHS capital programme.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the revenue expenditure of each health board on health service facilities for patients with a mental handicap for each year since 1981, in cash terms and at 1991 prices.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what studies have been conducted, or are under way, into the administrative workloads of doctors, nurses and clinical staff in the professions associated with medicine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No studies which address the administrative workloads of these staff groups have been undertaken or are planned in Scotland.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail his reasons for not allowing those local authorities which have incurred losses as a result of the BCCI affair to treat the sums involved as capital projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The accounting treatment of its BCCI loss is a matter for each local authority concerned to agree with its auditors.

Farming Policy

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next meet the Scottish TUC to discuss farming policy.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to meet the Scottish TUC.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limits for 1991-92 within his responsibility.

Mr. Lang: Yes, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary estimates, I intend to make changes to nine cash limits:

(a) The cash limit for class XV, vote 2: agricultural services and fisheries, Scotland, will be increased by £963,000 from £98,288,000 to £99,251,000. The increase in provision is required to meet an unexpected shortfall in appropriations in aid from disposals of property, higher than estimated commitments at the Scottish Agricultural college, increased provision for pensions and higher than anticipated demand under a number of grant schemes. These extra requirements are partly offset by savings elsewhere in the vote due to reduced demand under other grant schemes. The increase will be offset by taking up £543,000 end-year flexibility on capital spending and the balance of £420,000 forms part of the £578,000 reduction in the cash limit of class XV, vote 20, Scottish Office administration from £140,408,000 to £139,830,000.

(b) The cash limit for class XV, vote 7, housing, Scotland, will be increased by £7,690,000 from £499,608,000 to £507,298,000. Of this increase £7,545,000, to Scottish Homes' grant in aid, will assist housing associations in the acquisition of local authority and new town development corporation housing stock. The remainder will meet the costs of further publicity on the rent-to-mortgage scheme and the provision of advice on housing matters.

(c) The cash limit on class XV, vote 13, law, order and miscellaneous health services, Scotland, will be increased by £4,455,000 from £213,464,000 to £217,919,000. This increase will be offset by a reduction in the SO/LA1 cash block. The increased provision is required to cover additional costs in the administration of legal aid by the Scottish Legal Aid Board and to meet the costs of the investigations into war crimes and the Lockerbie air disaster. The remaining additional provision will cover the costs arising from the Orkney judicial inquiry, for social work offender services and miscellaneous health services.

(d) The cash limit for class XV, vote 14, education, arts and libraries, Scotland, will be reduced by £1,000,000 from £222,963,000 to £221,963,000. This reduction, due to slippage in major capital projects, will partly offset increases in other votes.

(e) The cash limit for class XV, vote 17, Scottish Record Office, will be reduced by £225,000 from £3,772,000 to £3,547,000. This reduction is due to slippage in a major capital project and will partly offset increased provision in other votes.

(f) The cash limit for class XV, vote 18, General Register Office for Scotland, will be reduced by £1,200,000 from £13,812,000 to £12,612,000. The bulk of this reduction arises from savings made in the costs of running the 1991 census and will partly offset increased provision in other votes.

(g) The cash limit for class XV, vote 20, Scottish Office administration, will be reduced by £578,000 from £140,908,000 to £140,330,000. This reduction will offset increases in capital and running cost provision in other votes. The running cost limit for the Scottish Office is unchanged.

(h) The cash limit for class XV, vote 26, hospital, community health, family health (part) and other health services, Scotland, will be reduced by £3,239,000 from £2,355,487,000 to £2,352,248,000. This reduction partly offsets increases in other votes.

(i) In addition the cash block SO/LA1, which covers non-housing capital expenditure by local authorities, will be reduced by £8,700,000 from £551,650,000 to £542,950,000. This reduction will partly offset increases in other votes.

(j) The non-voted cash block SO/LA2, which covers net capital allocation to local authorities on new town capital expenditure will be reduced by £7,690,000 from £343,496,000 to £335,806,000. This will partly offset increases in other votes.

All the increases mentioned will be offset by savings or charged to the reserve and therefore will not increase the planned total of public expenditure.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the latest estimates by the Registrar General of Populations of those aged 17 years and over, plus 63 per cent. of those aged 16 years, for each district council area and parliamentary constituency in Scotland, together in each case with the equivalent year's electoral registration figures.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 February 1992]*: The information requested is given in the tables. For clarity of presentation, the first table includes figures for regions and islands areas and the whole of Scotland. The population figures in Table B have been prepared by a method that involves a certain degree of approximation and therefore they must be treated with some caution.

Table A: Local Government Areas

Local government area	*Estimate of population aged 17 and over plus 63 per cent. of 16 year olds (as at 30 June 1990)*	*Parliamentary electors on the 1991 electoral registers (qualifying date 10 October 1990)*
Scotland	4,055,954	3,914,590
Borders Region	83,845	83,378
Berwickshire	15,441	15,259
Ettrick and Lauderdale	27,567	27,400
Roxburgh	28,595	28,499
Tweeddale	12,242	12,220
Central Region	215,986	210,222
Clackmannan	37,094	36,715
Falkirk	113,552	110,223
Stirling	65,340	63,284
Dumfries and Galloway Region	119,029	116,094
Annandale and Eskdale	29,621	29,264
Nithsdale	46,065	44,230
Stewartry	18,992	18,919
Wigtown	24,351	23,681
Fife Region	273,336	263,680
Dunfermline	101,428	95,900
Kirkcaldy	115,892	114,329
North East Fife	56,016	53,451
Grampian Region	401,190	390,495
Aberdeen City	172,460	168,296
Banff and Buchan	66,393	64,136
Gordon	56,466	56,167
Kincardine and Deeside	39,483	38,539
Moray	66,388	63,357
Highland Region	159,472	155,142
Badenoch and Strathspey	8,986	8,944
Caithness	20,817	20,616
Inverness	49,494	47,232
Lochaber	14,703	14,545
Nairn	8,185	8,140
Ross and Cromarty	37,517	36,188
Skye and Lochalsh	9,249	8,973
Sutherland	10,521	10,504
Lothian Region	607,502	591,083
East Lothian	69,581	67,216
Edinburgh City	358,377	352,219
Midlothian	64,514	60,873
West Lothian	115,030	110,775
Strathclyde Region	1,823,260	1,747,763
Argyll and Bute	51,929	48,068
Bearsden and Milngavie	33,224	31,550
Clydebank	37,692	35,414
Clydesdale	45,836	44,118
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	48,547	46,895
Cumnock and Doon Valley	33,910	33,334
Cunninghame	107,007	105,118
Dumbarton	61,509	57,730
East Kilbride	66,385	64,365
Eastwood	48,799	46,420
Glasgow City	551,285	524,706
Hamilton	82,804	80,750
Inverclyde	74,131	71,158
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	63,618	62,513
Kyle and Carrick	91,529	88,787
Monklands	80,606	78,113
Motherwell	114,673	109,290
Renfrew	159,659	155,286
Strathkelvin	70,117	64,148
Tayside Region	316,134	302,305
Angus	75,577	72,367
Dundee City	138,590	133,985
Perth and Kinross	101,967	95,953
Orkney Islands Area	15,369	15,206
Shetland Islands Area	16,856	16,149
Western Isles Islands Area	23,975	23,073

Table B: Parliamentary Constituencies

Parliamentary constituency	*Estimate of population aged 17 and over plus 63 per cent. of 16 year olds (as at 30 June 1990)*	*Parliamentary electors on the 1991 electoral registers (qualifying date 10 October 1990)*
Aberdeen North	61,700	60,219
Aberdeen South	60,100	58,681
Angus East	65,400	62,769
Argyll and Bute	51,900	48,068
Ayr	68,200	66,126
Banff and Buchan	66,400	64,136
Caithness and Sutherland	31,300	31,120
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	57,300	55,999
Central Fife	57,100	56,307
Clackmannan	49,900	49,140
Clydebank and Milngavie	50,800	47,861
Clydesdale	64,500	62,325
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	48,500	46,895
Cunninghame North	56,400	55,390
Cunninghame South	50,600	49,728
Dumbarton	61,500	57,730
Dumfries	62,900	61,235
Dundee East	61,000	58,935

Parliamentary constituency	*Estimate of population aged 17 and over plus 63 per cent. of 16 year olds (as at 30 June 1990)*	*Parliamentary electors on the 1991 electoral registers (qualifying date 10 October 1990)*
Dundee West	62,300	60,218
Dunfermline East	53,000	50,369
Dunfermline West	54,100	51,186
East Kilbride	66,400	64,365
East Lothian	69,600	67,223
Eastwood	67,200	64,276
Edinburgh Central	57,000	56,048
Edinburgh East	47,600	46,800
Edinburgh Leith	58,400	57,415
Edinburgh Pentlands	57,400	56,453
Edinburgh South	62,800	61,682
Edinburgh West	61,600	60,556
Falkirk East	53,900	52,307
Falkirk West	52,000	50,479
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	56,100	54,855
Glasgow Cathcart	48,200	45,835
Glasgow Central	51,300	48,862
Glasgow Garscadden	44,400	42,270
Glasgow Govan	49,100	46,720
Glasgow Hillhead	58,800	56,003
Glasgow Maryhill	50,800	48,393
Glasgow Pollok	49,600	47,206
Glasgow Provan	39,800	37,838
Glasgow Rutherglen	56,500	53,777
Glasgow Shettleston	54,800	52,129
Glasgow Springburn	48,200	45,873
Gordon	79,300	78,438
Greenock and Port Glasgow	55,500	53,267
Hamilton	64,100	62,543
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	70,900	68,848
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	63,600	62,513
Kincardine and Deeside	67,300	65,660
Kirkcaldy	53,100	52,419
Linlithgow	64,000	61,812
Livingston	64,300	62,070
Midlothian	64,500	60,875
Monklands East	50,800	49,226
Monklands West	53,000	50,132
Moray	66,400	63,357
Motherwell North	61,100	58,215
Motherwell South	53,800	51,236
North East Fife	56,000	53,399
North Tayside	58,300	55,252
Orkney and Shetland	32,200	31,355
Paisley North	49,100	47,770
Paisley South	50,500	49,091
Perth and Kinross	69,100	65,135
Renfrew West and Inverclyde	60,300	58,460
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	57,300	55,174
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	44,000	43,758
Stirling	60,200	58,296
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	66,800	61,806
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	39,800	39,608
Western Isles	24,000	23,073

Boarding Schools

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* for each local education authority and *(b)* by location, the current state-owned boarding schools and the pupil establishment for each school.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 29 January 1992]:* There are no boarding schools, in the generally understood sense of the term, under education authority management in Scotland.

Training

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average payment made to training managers for individual trainees on (i) youth training and (ii) employment training by Glasgow development agency last year and for the most recent date available.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 3 February 1992]:* Payments to training providers for individual trainees on youth training and employment training within Glasgow are a matter for Glasgow development agency.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the sum of the precepts of the spending authorities on the collecting authorities in Scotland in 1992-93, on the assumption that local authorities spend at their standard spending assessment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* The precept system does not apply in Scotland where each local authority sets its own community charge.

East Kilbride Development Corporation

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those organisations and individuals who responded to the consultation process in the wind-up of East Kilbride development corporation.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* Responses were received from the following organisations:

East Kilbride Development Corporation
Strathclyde Regional Council
East Kilbride District Council
Glasgow District Council
Scottish Enterprise
Lanarkshire Development Agency
Scottish Homes
National and Local Government Officers Association
East Kilbride Business Centre

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 February 1992

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Staffordshire Education

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what was the pupil-teacher ratio in Staffordshire *(a)* in all schools and *(b)* in secondary schools in each year since 1979;

(2) what was the pupil-teacher ratio in each shire county in England in the most recent year for which figures are available *(a)* in primary schools and *(b)* in secondary schools.

Mr. Eggar: The pupil-teacher ratios for the categories requested are shown in the following tables.

Pupil-teacher ratios in Staffordshire local education authority 1979 to 1991[1]

	Maintained secondary schools[1]	*All maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools*[1]
1991	15·8	17·7
1990	15·7	18·0
1989	15·9	18·0
1988	16·3	18·0
1987	16·4	18·0
1986	16·5	18·3
1985	16·1	17·9
1984	16·3	17·8
1983	16·4	18·0
1982	16·5	18·7
1981	16·4	17·7
1980	16·5	18·5
1979	16·7	19·2

Pupil-teacher ratios in non-metropolitan counties, in England, as at January 1991

	Maintained primary schools[1]	*Maintained secondary schools*[1]
Isles of Scilly	15·1	8·0
Avon	22·4	16·0
Bedfordshire	21·6	16·8
Berkshire	23·4	15·6
Buckinghamshire	22·9	16·0
Cambridgeshire	23·0	16·1
Cheshire	24·2	16·4
Cleveland	23·4	14·9
Cornwall	23·3	16·3
Cumbria	22·2	15·0
Derbyshire	21·7	14·1
Devon	22·7	16·1
Dorset	22·9	16·4
Durham	22·3	16·1
East Sussex	22·2	15·8
Essex	23·1	16·6
Gloucestershire	21·3	15·7
Hampshire	22·8	15·8
Hereford and Worcester	22·4	16·5
Hertfordshire	22·0	15·4
Humberside	22·6	15·7
Isle of Wight	22·8	16·9
Kent	24·3	16·6
Lancashire	23·1	15·7
Leicestershire	22·9	15·0
Lincolnshire	23·5	16·2
Norfolk	22·1	15·3
North Yorkshire	22·4	15·3
Northamptonshire	22·6	16·3
Northumberland	23·5	16·7
Nottinghamshire	22·0	14·9
Oxfordshire	22·6	16·6
Shropshire	21·4	15·0
Somerset	22·1	15·7
Staffordshire	23·1	15·8
Suffolk	21·6	16·4
Surrey	21·3	15·1
Warwickshire	21·7	15·5
West Sussex	22·1	16·2
Wiltshire	21·9	15·5

[1] The pupil-teacher ratios presented for individual types of school take account only of qualified teachers within schools, whereas the calculation of the overall PTRs take account of *all* teachers employed by LEAs and grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil in Staffordshire in each year since 1979 *(a)* in primary schools and *(b)* in secondary schools at 1992 prices.

Mr. Eggar: Spending per pupil in primary schools and in secondary schools in Staffordshire is shown in the table. The table shows actual spending from 1979-80 to 1989-90, the latest year for which the information is available, at 1991-92 prices.

Net institutional expenditure[1] *per pupil at 1991-92 prices*[2]

Year	*Primary (£)*	*Secondary (£)*
1979-80	1,000	1,400
1980-81	1,085	1,470
1981-82	1,145	1,510
1982-83	1,170	1,505
1983-84	1,215	1,565
1984-85	1,175	1,555
1985-86	1,175	1,625
1986-87	1,230	1,755
1987-88	[3]1,310	1,895
1988-89	[3]1,300	1,990
[4]1989-90	[3]1,340	2,080

[1] Net institutional expenditure covers the direct costs in schools of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the costs of school meals, home to school transport, LEA central administration, and financing costs of capital expenditure.

[2] Figures for earlier years have been repriced to 1991-92 prices using the GDP (market prices) deflator index.

[3] Spending on nursery and primary schools was not collected separately for years after 1986-87, so per pupil figures for these years cover both nursery and primary schools.

[4] The figures in the tables are derived from local education authorities' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment and of their pupil numbers to the Department of Education and Science.

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many pupils attended schools in Staffordshire in each year since 1979; and how many of these attended secondary schools and how many attended primary schools.

Mr. Eggar: Information on the number of full-time equivalent pupils, who attended maintained schools in Staffordshire local education authority, for each year since 1979 is given, by type of school, in the following table.

Full-time equivalents of pupils in maintained schools in Staffordshire local education authority
1979 to 1991

	Nursery	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Special*	*Total*
1991	1,500	88,400	67,200	2,100	159,200
1990	1,400	87,000	67,400	2,000	157,800
1989	1,500	84,300	69,400	2,000	157,200
1988	1,400	80,800	75,000	2,100	159,300
1987	1,400	79,300	79,800	2,200	162,600
1986	1,400	79,100	83,800	2,200	166,500
1985	1,400	78,200	88,600	2,300	170,500
1984	1,400	80,300	91,600	2,400	175,700
1983	1,400	84,600	89,900	2,400	178,300
1982	1,400	89,300	90,500	2,400	183,600
1981	1,400	94,700	90,800	2,500	189,400
1980	1,400	100,100	88,600	2,500	192,600
1979	1,400	104,800	86,700	2,500	195,400

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent on school education in Staffordshire in each year since 1979 at constant prices.

Mr. Eggar: Net recurrent spending on nursery, primary and secondary school education in Staffordshire is shown in the table. The figures are shown at 1989-90 prices, the latest year for which actual spending information is available.

Year	*Net recurrent expenditure (£ million)*
1979-80	201·3
1980-81	211·1
1981-82	216·8
1982-83	212·8
1983-84	215·5
1984-85	209·5
1985-86	206·6
1986-87	214·0
1987-88	221·3
1988-89	221·2
1989-90	229·6

Notes:

1. Net recurrent expenditure on education includes total expenditure other than costs of financing capital expenditure, less income other than from specific grants.
2. Figures for earlier years have been repriced to 1989-90 prices using the GDP (market prices) deflator index.
3. The figures in the tables are derived from local education authorities' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil in each shire county in England in the most recent year for which figures are available *(a)* in primary schools and *(b)* in secondary schools.

Mr. Eggar: In 1989-90, the latest year for which figures on actual spending are available, spending per pupil in nursery and primary schools and in secondary schools for each shire county in England was as follows:

Net institutional expenditure¹ per pupil

County	*Nursery and primary schools (£)*	*Secondary schools (£)*
Avon	1,195	1,800
Bedfordshire	1,240	1,815
Berkshire	1,105	1,735
Buckinghamshire	1,170	1,850
Cambridgeshire	1,115	1,640
Cheshire	1,050	1,715
Cleveland	1,150	1,915
Cornwall	1,095	1,690
Cumbria	1,265	1,845
Derbyshire	1,230	1,975
Devon	1,095	1,705
Dorset	1,120	1,635
Durham	1,225	1,735
East Sussex	1,125	1,765
Essex	1,150	1,800
Gloucestershire	1,140	1,735
Hampshire	1,125	1,790
Hereford and Worcester	1,145	1,635
Hertfordshire	1,245	1,900
Humberside	1,265	1,700
Isle of Wight	1,125	1,575
Kent	1,030	1,565
Lancashire	1,090	1,810
Leicestershire	1,180	1,900
Lincolnshire	1,110	1,630
Norfolk	1,160	1,810
North Yorkshire	1,095	1,760
Northamptonshire	1,095	1,685
Northumberland	1,175	1,645
Nottinghamshire	1,255	1,955
Oxfordshire	1,205	1,810
Shropshire	1,160	1,855
Somerset	1,145	1,745
Staffordshire	1,155	1,790
Suffolk	1,120	1,820
Surrey	1,140	1,675
Warwickshire	1,140	1,770
West Sussex	1,145	1,745
Wiltshire	1,125	1,700

Notes:

1. Net institutional expenditure covers the direct costs in schools of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the costs of school meals, home to school transport, LEA central administration, and financing costs of capital expenditure.
2. The figures in the tables are derived from local education authorities' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment and of their pupil numbers to the Department of Education and Science.
3. Spending on Nursery and primary schools is not collected separately.

Ko Hsuan School, Chawleigh

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last received a report on the standards of education at the Ko Hsuan school in Chawleigh, North Devon.

Mr. Eggar: Her Majesty's inspectors last visited the school in March 1990 in order to inspect, in particular, the boarding accommodation and the occupation and supervision of pupils after normal school hours. Before that, the school was visited in September 1988 when all aspects of its provision, including education, were inspected in order to advise the Department about final registration, which followed in April 1989.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

EC (Surplus Produce)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the current levels of surplus produce in store within the EC in connection with the operational activities of the common agricultural policy; and if he will provide separate figures for each commodity and separate figures for each year since 1988.

Mr. Curry: Tables showing current levels of surplus produce in store within the EC have been deposited in the Library of the House at monthly intervals throughout the period in question.

Meat (Drug Residues)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions during 1990 and 1991 illegal drug residues were identified in meat or animals destined for human consumption at *(a)* slaughterhouses, *(b)* retail outlets, *(c)* farms and *(d)* other locations; and what number of such incidents resulted in successful prosecutions.

Mr. Maclean: The number of cases of illegal drug residues detected in Great Britain by the Ministry was as follows:

	1990	*1991*
On farm	1	4
At slaughterhouses	22	—
At retail outlets	n/a	n/a
Other locations	—	—

n/a = Not available.

In all positive cases identified at Great Britain slaughterhouses, follow up visits to the farms of origin are made by members of the state veterinary service. Whenever firm evidence is obtained, action is then pursued through the courts. One successful prosecution was taken in 1991 which resulted in a fine of £2,400 plus £5,234 costs.

Foodstuffs (Destruction)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the amount of each foodstuff and fruits which were destroyed in the United Kingdom and the EC respectively in connection with the operational activities of the common agricultural policy in the most recent annual period for which figures are available.

Mr. Curry: The relevant information in respect of the EC relates to the 1988-89 season and is as follows:

Product	*Quantity (tonnes)*
Clementines	2,376
Satsumas	—
Nectarines	8,671
Oranges	988
Mandarins	—
Apples	183,183
Table grapes	—
Pears	2,022
Lemons	—
Apricots	305
Peaches	32,663
Aubergines	123
Tomatoes	8,130
Cauliflowers	38,831

The most recent figures for the United Kingdom relate to the calendar year 1991 and are as follows:

Product	*Quantity (tonnes)*
Apples	2,725
Pears	73
Cauliflowers	4,699

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he took part in party-political activities in addition to official duties on his visit to Hong Kong in October 1991.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend does from time to time meet fellow Conservatives in the margins of public duties. He also often meets opposition leaders of all political persuasions both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

ENVIRONMENT

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the level of radioactive discharge from Glaxochem of Ulverston, British Nuclear Fuels Drigg site, Albright and Wilson and British Nuclear Fuels Sellafield to the sea along the coast of Cumbria, separately, in each year since 1980.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is as listed:

Year	*Albright and Wilson*[1]	*Glaxochem*[2]	*Drigg*[3] *Total Alpha*	*Drigg*[3] *Total Beta*	*Sellafield*[4] *Total Alpha*	*Sellafield*[4] *Total Beta*
1980	22	17·9	2·3	27	39·00	4,306·0
1981	14	127·0	2·2	38	30·00	3,800·0
1982	22	118·0	3·1	44	28·00	3,528·0
1983	40	31·9	3·2	46	14·00	2,489·0
1984	43	37·0	3·1	56	14·00	1,190·0
1985	44	109·0	2·8	58	6·00	587·0
1986	38	256·0	4·3	73	4·40	118·0
1987	44	160·0	<3·0	82	2·20	89·2
1988	64	151·0	<2·0	92	2·10	81·3

Year	Albright and Wilson[1]	Glaxochem[2]	Drigg[3] Total Alpha	Drigg[3] Total Beta	Sellafield[4] Total Alpha	Sellafield[4] Total Beta
1989	52	214·0	<1·0	58	2·70	101·0
1990	49	76·0	4·0	34	2·16	70·9

[1] Uranium in tonnes.

[2] Magabecquerels.

[3] Mean activity, Becquerels per litre.

[4] Terabecquerels.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to hold a Planning Inquiry Commission to consider any proposals from UK Nirex for a deep repository for intermediate and low level radioactive waste.

Sir George Young: No. I am satisfied that a normal planning inquiry could deal satisfactorily with any planning application that Nirex may make.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the current proposals by UK Nirex for the development of an underground repository for intermediate and low level radioactive waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: None. UK Nirex Ltd. is currently consulting widely on its extensive revision of the design for a deep disposal facility for low and intermediate level radioactive waste.

Landfill Sites (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of landfill sites in County Durham at present used for dumping colliery waste; and when the dumping of colliery waste into the sea will cease.

Mr. Baldry: Information concerning the number of landfill sites used for dumping colliery waste is not held centrally.

Disposal on the beaches and at sea is licensed by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. On 14 June 1990, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced that the dumping of colliery waste on to beaches in the north-east of England should stop as soon as practicable. No application would be approved to permit the dumping of minestone on to beaches beyond December 1995, or offshore into the sea beyond December 1997, unless use of the planning system has shown that no practical land-based methods of disposal were available. This timetable allows for alternatives to be identified, necessary planning permissions to be sought and a chosen method to be identified.

The pipeline discharge of liquid tailings is carried out under consents given by the National Rivers Authority (NRA) under the Control of Pollution Act 1974. The NRA has also told British Coal that it expects early progress to be made on the identification of alternative disposal methods.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if people exempt from paying the community charge in the category "severely mentally impaired" will have to reapply for this status under the council tax.

Mr. Key: People who are severely mentally impaired will be eligible for discounts under the council tax. Local authorities will be required to take reasonable steps to ascertain whether discounts apply. Where such a person has been exempt from the personal community charge, a local authority should not need any further evidence that he is severely mentally impaired.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to bring forward regulations defining the conditions necessary to qualify as severely mentally impaired under the Local Government Finance Bill.

Mr. Key: The local authority associations are currently being consulted about draft regulations. Copies of the draft were placed in the Library pursuant to a question on 31 January (column *642)*. Regulations will be laid before Parliament as soon as possible after the Bill receives Royal Assent.

Traveller's Sites

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the provisions of the Caravan Sites Act 1968 so far as they apply to the obligation placed on local authorities to provide sites for gipsies and other travellers.

Sir George Young: I know that the operation of the provisions for gipsies in the Caravan Sites Act 1968 gives rise to some difficulties, and the Government have the matter under review.

Gipsies

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information is available to his Department about the composition and numbers of gipsy communities in England and Wales.

Sir George Young: The Department asks local authorities to carry out a twice yearly count of gipsy caravans in their area on two specific days, in January and July each year. The statistics provided to the Department by local authorities in July 1991 showed a total of 12,316 caravans in England. The Welsh Office has responsibility for gipsies in Wales.

I am arranging for a copy of the July 1991 count to be placed in the Library of the House.

Housing Associations (Empty Properties)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing association properties were empty on the last date for which figures are available; and for how long.

Mr. Yeo: Information collected by the Housing Corporation shows that in March 1991, 16,400 housing association properties in England were empty (2·7 per cent. of the total stock).

The breakdown by duration of vacancy is as follows:

thousands

	Vacant and available for letting	*Vacant and not available for letting*[1]	*All vacant*
Less than six months	6·7	3·5	10·2
Six months—one year	0·4	1·8	2·2
Over one year	0·2	3·8	4·0
Total	7·3	9·1	16·4

[1] Many of these are dwellings which have been purchased and require rehabilitation before they are suitable for occupation.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will establish an inquiry into the alleged breaches of competition rules by private contractors with regard to compulsory competitive tendering in local authority sports and leisure management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: If the hon. Member wishes to provide details of the allegations to which he refers, then my right hon. Friend will consider whether action is appropriate.

Local Government Legislation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list of all legislation introduced since October 1988 relating directly to local government.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* I attach a list of Public General Acts which have received Royal Assent since October 1988, and which relate directly to local government. Part I lists those Acts for which my Department has been responsible; part II lists those Acts for which other Departments have been responsible; and part III lists consolidation legislation (both DOE and other Government Departments).

Public General Acts which have received Royal Assent since October 1988 and which relate directly to local government

Part I: DOE Acts

Caravans (Standard Community Charge and Rating) Act 1991
Community Charges (General Reduction) Act 1991
Community Charges (Substitute Setting) Act 1991
Environmental Protection Act 1990
Housing Act 1988
Local Government Finance and Valuation Act 1991
Local Government and Housing Act 1989
Planning and Compensation Act 1991
Rate Support Grants Act 1988
Water Act 1989

Part II: Other Government Departments' Acts

Dangerous Dogs Act 1989
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991
Food Safety Act 1990
National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990
New Roads and Street Works Act 1991
Road Traffic Act 1988
Road Traffic Act 1991
Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988
School Teachers Pay and Conditions No. 2 Act

Part III: Consolidation Acts

Children Act 1989
Deer Act 1991
Land Drainage Act 1991
Planning (Consequential Provisions) Act 1990
Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
Town and Country Planning Act 1990
Water Consolidation (Consequential Provisions) Act 1991

"Competing for Quality"

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses he has received to his consultation paper "Competing for Quality"; what proportion of responses were broadly against the proposals contained in the consultation document; if he will place those responses in the Library; and when the Government will publish their final proposals.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* To date my Department has received some 470 responses to the consultation paper "Competing for Quality—Competition in the Provision of Local Services". We have started to analyse those responses. We have indicated that we may wish to place in the Libraries of Parliament copies of all responses whose authors have not asked that they be treated as confidential. We shall publish our final proposals in due course.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Annual Reports

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has plans to extend the requirement to report on employee involvement in company annual reports so as to include a report on employee involvement in any merger decisions.

Mr. Redwood: No. The existing provisions in schedule 7 of the Companies Act 1985 that companies with more than 250 employees should include a statement in their directors' report on their arrangements for informing and consulting employees on matters of concern to them in effect already cover this point.

Cigarette Advertising (Toys)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what controls the Government have over the sale of children's toys which carry cigarette brand logos.

Mr. Leigh: My Department has no controls over the sale of toys carrying cigarette brand logos. The use of cigarette brand logos on toys is a moral issue rather than a safety one and is not covered by the Toys (Safety) Regulations.

However, I understand that tobacco companies have not given permission for the use of their logos on toys.

Consumers can make it clear to suppliers of toys that they will not buy toys which bear cigarette brand logos.

Briefings

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the date of each briefing his Department has afforded to hon. Members prior to visits to the former Soviet Union since 1979.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 6 February 1992]*: Detailed records for the whole period since 1979 are not available.

Package Travel

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to consult interested parties on the draft regulations to implement the European Community package travel directive.

Mr. Leigh: Following the consultation period we initiated in July 1991, my Department has today issued for consultation draft regulations covering articles 1 to 6 of the directive. These lay down minimum standards for the way that consumers of packages are to be treated by the travel organiser and travel agent. In particular, the legislation:

- sets out the information to be included in brochures, and other information which must be supplied to the consumer before the start of the holiday;
- defines the circumstances in which changes may or may not be made to the particulars in the brochure;
- lays down the matters which must be included in the contract;
- regulates the circumstances in which surcharges can be made and provides that no price increases may be made within 30 days before departure;
- places the liability for the package on the other party to the contract with the consumer (usually the organiser).

These requirements will be backed up by a combination of new criminal offences and civil liabilities.

The circumstances under which surcharges are allowed have been brought into line with the voluntary code of practice operated by members of the Association of British Travel Agents. This has been done under the provision in the directive which allows us to adopt more stringent provisions to protect the consumer.

I expect to consult shortly on our proposals for implementing article 7 of the directive which requires organisers and/or retailers to show evidence of security for the refund of money paid over and for the repatriation of the consumer in the event of insolvency.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Uninsured Drivers

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were prosecuted for driving a vehicle whilst uninsured for the last three available years.

Mr. John Patten: The following table shows the number of court proceedings for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks.

Proceedings for the offence of using motor vehicle uninsured against thrid party risks in England and Wales 1988-1990

Year	Number of offences
1988	294,966
1989	304,432
[1]1990	317,797

[1] Provisional

The number of people involved is likely to be less because some may have been proceeded against for more than one of these offences.

Jeremiah Miller

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received and if he will refer to the Court of Appeal for review of the sentence against Jeremiah Miller, presently a prisoner at Garth prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I have received and considered representations on the case from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill and from one other hon. Member. In the absence of anything new that appears to touch the safety of the conviction, there are not on present information grounds to justify intervention. I am always ready to consider any alleged new evidence.

Bail Offenders

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies his Department has undertaken of re-offending on bail.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my right hon. Friend to the answer I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) on 6 February at column *247*.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the claim of Mr. and Mrs. D. N. Eastwood, who used to live at 33 Buxton road, Rock Ferry, Birkenhead, was first registered with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; when he expects the board to come to a conclusion on the claim; and what is the average length of time the board now takes to settle claims.

Mr. John Patten: The administration of the criminal injuries compensation scheme and the determination of individual applications is entirely a matter for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. I am accordingly asking the board to reply directly to the hon. Member about this case.

The board does not produce statistics on the average time taken to settle claims. But percentages of cases resolved within certain periods of registration are given in the board's annual report, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Abdul Rauf

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department received a telex from the high commission in Islamabad inquiring about the outcome of an appeal by Mr. Abdul Rauf (Ref. IMM/V/24399/89; TH 19383/89) against refusal to grant him a visa to visit the United Kingdom; what reply has been sent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A telex from the high commission in Islamabad about the outcome of Mr. Abdul Rauf's appeal was received on 12 December 1991. The Immigration and Nationality Department replied by telex on 19 December 1991 confirming that the appeal had been allowed, that the adjudicator had issued no directions, and that a further copy of the determination would be sent. A copy had been despatched to the high commission on 15 October 1990 but does not appear to have reached its destination. I very much regret that as a result the issue of Mr. Rauf's visa was delayed.

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Turkish nationals have *(a)* sought asylum in the United Kingdom and *(b)* been granted asylum in each year since 1980.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information is given in the following table.

Information on applications in 1991 is available only for principal applicants excluding dependants, while for 1980-84 it is available only including dependants. Figures are therefore shown on both bases, where available, for comparison.

Applications[1] by Turkish nationals for refugee status or asylum in the United Kingdom and numbers granted[2] 1980-91

	Applications		Granted refugee status or asylum	
	Excluding dependants	*Including associated dependants[2]*	*Excluding dependants*	*Including associated dependants[2]*
1980	. .	21	. .	1
1981	. .	1	. .	1
1982	. .	38	. .	6
1983	. .	43	. .	18
1984	. .	61	. .	46
1985	27	34	10	12
1986	86	111	9	13
1987	121	210	3	5
1988	337	705	5	5
[3]1989	2,300	4,500	205	390
[3]1990	1,105	1,455	235	530
[3]1990	2,100	. .	[4]—	[4]—

[1] Grants in a particular year do not necessarily relate to applications made in that year.

[2] Including dependants applying with the principal applicant and those to date, arriving subsequently but before the principal application was decided.

[3] Figures rounded to nearest 5.

. . Not available.

[4] Not yet available.

Police Cells (Lay Visitors)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what allowances or payments in compensation for loss of earnings are available to lay visitors to prisoners held in police cells.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Home Office guidance to police authorities is that travelling expenses will be payable to lay visitors on the same basis as to members of authorities when travelling on authority business.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the expenditure on mortgage interest tax relief for the calendar year 1991.

Mr. Maude: Tax relief is calculated for the fiscal year. Provisional estimates of the cost of mortgage interest tax relief for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are £7·7 billion, and £6·1 billion respectively.

Higher-rate Taxpayers

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many higher-rate taxpayers in 1992-93 he estimates will be using the married couple's allowance; and what proportion of higher-rate taxpayers this represents, assuming statutory indexation for 1992-93 limits and allowances.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that 1·1 million higher rate taxpayers—70 per cent. of the total—would be entitled to the married couple's allowance in 1992-93, assuming statutory indexation.

Profit-related Pay

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees participated in live registered profit-related pay schemes in the last period for which figures are available; how many schemes are in operation; and what is the estimated total value of those schemes.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* There were 581,000 participating employees in 2,049 live registered profit-related pay schemes at the end of December 1991. On the basis of the latest information provided by participating employers, the total annual value of the distributable PRP pool for these schemes is tentatively estimated at about £400 million.

PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Mr. Harris: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the names of all persons who have served as special advisers to Ministers, by Department *(a)* from June 1987 to November 1990 and *(b)* since November 1990; and if he will indicate where possible the individual's prior profession or employment.

The Prime Minister: Information on the names of special advisers, including part-timers, and their Departments is as follows. Information on prior employment or profession is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Special advisers serving from June 1987 to November 1990

Name	*Department*
K. Adams	Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
R. Guesterbock	Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
N. R. Blackwell	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
G. D. Bourne	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
Sir P. Cradduck	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
A. J. Dunlop	Cabinet Office (including No. 10) (formerly Defence)
Miss R. Z. Finlay	Cabinet Office (Chief Whip's Office)
Mrs. T. Gaisman	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
Professor B. Griffiths	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
G. R. J. Guise	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
R. D. R. Harris	Cabinet Office (including No. 10) (formerly Lord President)
H. Harris-Hughes	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
V. E. Hartley-Booth	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
A. J. O'Sullivan	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
Mrs. A. Ponsonby	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
I. K. Whitehead	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
J. B. Wybrew	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
K. R. Simpson	Defence
T. Kerpel	Education and Science
Mrs. E. Laing	Education and Science
W. M. Lightfoot	Employment
J. Derrick	Energy
N. D. Martin	Energy
G. Black	Energy
T. Collins	Employment (formerly Environment)
R. Marsh	Environment

Name	*Department*
Professor D. Pearce	Environment
P. J. Rock	Environment
A. D. Fergusson	Foreign and Commonwealth
M. Fraser	Foreign and Commonwealth
J. Houston	Foreign and Commonwealth
D. R. Liddington	Foreign and Commonwealth (formerly Home Office)
A. Turner	Health and Social Security
J. H. Hill	Health (formerly Trade and Industry)
Mrs. T. Keswick	Health
Miss M. Libby	Social Security (formerly Health and Social Security)
L. Stewart	Social Security
E. S. C. Bickham	Home Office
J. P. Godfrey	Home Office
M. Simmonds	Home Office (formerly Trade and Industry)
J. Taylor	Home Office
A. Teasdale	Lord President (formerly Foreign and Commonwealth)
Dr. E. Cottrell	Privy Council Office
G. J. Carter	Scottish Office
A. Young	Scottish Office
C. Hendry	Trade and industry (formerly Health and Social Security)
H. James	Trade and Industry
P. Luff	Trade and Industry
J. Mayhew	Trade and Industry
Mrs. K. Ramsay	Trade and Industry (formerly Environment)
Sir J. Sterling	Trade and Industry
Miss E. Buchanan	Transport
Professor B. J. Hoskins	Transport
M. Call	Treasury
Mrs. J. Chaplin	Treasury
P. J. Cropper	Treasury
W. M. Lightfoot	Treasury (formerly Employment)
A. G. Tyrie	Treasury
R. Richards	Welsh Office

Special advisers serving since November 1990.

Name	*Department*
K. Adams	Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Sir P. Craddock	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
Mrs. R. Z. Finlay	Cabinet Office (Chief Whip)
H. Harris-Hughes	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
J. H. Hill	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
Mrs. S. Hogg	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
A. Rosling	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
N. True	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
Miss B. Wallis	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)
Ms. S. Hole	Cabinet Office (Chief Whip's Office)
P. Moman	Cabinet Office (Privy Council Office)
J. R. M. Gardner	Defence
Mrs. T. Keswick	Education and Science
D. L. Ruffley	Education and Science
T. Collins	Employment
I. Wilton	Employment
G. Black	Energy
T. Burke	Environment
Miss A. Broom	Environment
Professor P. Hall	Environment
Dr. A. Kemp	Environment
Sir P. Levene	Environment
Professor D. Pearce	Environment
Lady Strathnaver	Environment
E. Bickham	Foreign and Commonwealth
M. Fraser	Foreign and Commonwealth
Ms. L. Campey	Health
Mrs. K. Ramsay	Health
R. J. Marsh	Health (formerly Environment)
T. Kerpel	Home Office
C. M. Grantham	Home Office
J. Caine	Northern Ireland Office
Mrs. E. Laing	Privy Council Office (Lord President)
Ms. S. McEwen	Privy Council Office (Lord Privy Seal)
A. Young	Scottish Office
I. Stewart	Social Security
L. Anisfield	Trade and Industry
J. Mayhew	Trade and Industry
P. J. E. Miller	Transport
Dr. P. W. Robinson	Treasury
A. Ross-Goobey	Treasury
W. M. Lightfoot	Treasury
R. Richards	Welsh Office

Eggs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the respective responsibilities of the Minister of Agriculture and the Secretary of State for Health in ensuring that foreign imports of eggs are free of salmonella infection and satisfy the quality requirements of United Kingdom produced eggs.

The Prime Minister: The Secretary of State for Health has lead responsibility for the Imported Food Regulations 1984 which contain measures for the protection of public health in relation to imported food, including eggs. Responsibility for the enforcement of the regulations lies with local authorities and port health authorities. The Minister of Agriculture acted jointly with the Secretary of State for Health in the making of the regulations.

Members' Correspondence

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what specific procedures he has laid down for Ministers and Departments for the answering of hon. Members' urgent correspondence;

(2) what response times have been or will be established for departmental replies to hon. Members' letters under the citizens charter;

(3) what is the average time taken by Ministers to reply to hon. Members' letters in each Department.

The Prime Minister: Following the publication of the efficiency scrutiny of ministerial correspondence in December 1990, the Government have reinforced their efforts to ensure that letters from hon. Members receive proper consideration and replies within a reasonable time. These include extensive use of targets for reply times, monitoring and publication of performance against targets, and more efficient ways of dealing with letters within Departments and agencies. Departments will each publish their performance against targets for replies to ministerial correspondence.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what data information systems his Office has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet Office and 10 Downing street each have data information systems.

We have not been consulted with a view to taking part in other data information systems, and there are no current or planned links to the police national computer.

A X400 electronic mail link is planned between the networks, and in due course to other Government Departments.

The Data Protection Act applies to both systems and appropriate registrations have been made.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women under the age of 21 years who were registered as unemployed in the London borough of Wandsworth on 31 January.

Mr. Jackson: Unemployment figures by age and duration are available on a quarterly basis and for standard age bands only. In October 1991, the latest available date, there were 500 male and 306 female unemployed claimants aged under 20 years in the London borough of Wandsworth.

Figures relating to January 1992 will be released on 18 February 1992.

Small Businesses

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the total number of firms in Great Britain employing *(a)* fewer than 20, *(b)* fewer than 10 and *(c)* fewer than five employees; if he will list these totals as a percentage of the total number of firms registered in Great Britain; if he will provide similar information for European Community and OECD countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The available information for the United Kingdom is given in the following table. I regret that comparable information for other countries is not available.

Number of businesses[1] by size band
United Kingdom; end 1989

[2]*Employment size band*	*Number of businesses thousand*	*Share of total businesses per cent.*
1 to 5	2,621	87·7
6 to 10	181	6·1
11 to 19	92	3·1

[1] Includes all businesses, whether registered for VAT or not.
[2] Total employment, including self-employed proprietors.

CIVIL SERVICE

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Cabinet Office (Office for the Minister for the Civil Service) has a number of networked data information systems in its buildings in London and Basingstoke.

We have not been consulted with a view to taking part in other data information systems, and there are no current or planned links to the police national computer.

An X400 electronic mail link is planned between each major network and to other Government Departments.

The 1984 Data Protection Act applies to the existing systems and the necessary registrations have been made.

WALES

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number, for each regional health authority, of in-patient residents in health service facilities for patients with a mental handicap for each year since 1981; and what proportion of the reduction in numbers is due to discharge and what proportion due to death, in each regional health authority.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information is not available in the exact form requested. There are no regional health authorities within Wales. The table gives information in respect of NHS hospital facilities in Wales for patients with a mental handicap. Deaths and discharges of patients from such facilities relate either to those patients resident at the end of the previous year or those who were admitted during the year.

Year	*Resident patients*[1]	*Discharges*[2] *(per cent.)*	*Deaths*[2] *(per cent.)*
1981	2,153	96·4	3·6
1982	2,103	96·3	3·7
1983	2,064	97·5	2·5
1984	1,962	97·5	2·5
1985	1,883	97·5	2·5
1986	1,792	97·5	2·5
1987	1,692	97·4	2·6
1988	1,582	97·1	2·9
1989	1,470	97·0	3·0
[3]1990	1,335	97·5	2·5

[1] At 31 December, in NHS hospital facilities for patients with a mental handicap.
[2] As a percentage of all deaths and discharges during the year from NHS hospital facilities for patients with a mental handicap.
[3] Provisional.

Ophthalmic Cases

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what representations have been made to the end of 1991 by West Glamorgan health authority for assistance with its waiting list for ophthalmic cases.

(2) what bids for funding under the waiting list initiative has been made by each health authority to clear waiting lists for ophthalmic operations.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To help with its ophthalmic waiting lists, West Glamorgan health authority made a bid for funds under the 1991-92 waiting times initiative. Out of the £1·3 million available at the all Wales level the authority received a total of £256,000, including £49,000 specifically for ophthalmic lists.

In addition, between March and December 1991, 85 West Glamorgan residents were referred to the two ophthalmic treatment centres at Bangor and Bridgend, and benefited from the opportunity to receive earlier treatment through this initiative which is unique to Wales.

West Glamorgan health authority has also received an extra £250,000 towards reducing waiting lists, part of an overall package of £1·8 million which I announced today. This is aimed at further reducing waiting lists throughout Wales.

West Glamorgan Health Authority

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for which specialties West Glamorgan health authority has sought Welsh Office funding in each of the last five years and during 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Since April 1991, all health authorities have been funded to secure services for their resident population. Prior to the introduction of the National Health Service reforms, health authorities were funded on an historic basis, reflecting the level of specialties and services which they inherited in 1974 at the time of the National Health Service reorganisation.

Prior to the de-designation of regional services from 1 April 1991, West Glamorgan was also centrally funded to provide the following regional specialties:

Renal Dialysis
Radiotherapy and Oncology
Burns and Plastic Surgery Service Development

Since 1 April 1991, central funds have been devolved to user health authorities to contract with providing units for all former regional services on behalf of their resident populations. West Glamorgan health authority continues to be centrally funded for the burns and plastic surgery service development at Morriston hospital.

HEALTH

Management Executive

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the present work programme of the NHS management executive on the improvement of district purchasing functions; and how their purchasing functions are kept under review.

Mr. Dorrell: A range of project-based work is in progress which includes work on creating healthy alliances for joint purchasing between district health authorities, family health services authorities, local authorities and others; developing an intelligence capability; ways of involving local people in purchasing; setting priorities and monitoring and evaluating contract effectiveness. A series of epidemiologically-based needs assessments have also been commissioned and 11 learning networks have been sponsored with over 55 district health authorities purchasing teams participating. The management executive is also working closely with the regional health authorities in the development of regionally specific comprehensive purchaser development programmes for 1992-93.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of acute NHS hospital beds that would become vacant if people who are medically ready to leave hospital, and who have been made a firm offer of a place in a residential/nursing home, and were given a social fund community cost grant to bridge the financial difference between the residential fees charged by the receiving home and the current levels of DSS residential/nursing home fees.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available to prepare such an estimate.

Blood Plasma

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *180*, if he will list the blood and plasma products in addition to source plasma exported from the United Kingdom by the bio products laboratory, or by a broker on behalf of the bio products laboratory, in each of the last two years; and if he will give the number of units of each product exported in total from the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is commercially confidential.

Geriatric Care

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many district health authorities have renegotiated contracts for geriatric care outside their authority boundaries; and if he will list them;

(2) for each district health authority, how many extra-contractual referrals for geriatric cases have been *(a)* made, *(b)* funded and *(c)* not funded since the introduction of the internal market in April 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effect of the National Health Service internal market on cross-boundary flows for geriatric cases.

Mr. Dorrell: We are satisfied that the contractual arrangements introduced by health authorities provide for the great majority of referrals and that, where no contract is in place, there are arrangements for making extra-contractual referrals.

Health Education Authority

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the budget for the Health Education Authority between 1 April 1990 and 30 September 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: The total allocation to the Health Education Authority for 1990-91 was £28,749,000 and for 1991-92 is £31,427,000. There is no specific budget for part of a financial year.

Health Promotion

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure by district health authorities on health promotion between 1 April 1990 and 31 September 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: Financial returns submitted to the Department by district health authorities in England for the financial year 1990-91 separately identify revenue expenditure on health promotion and education totalling some £71 million—a provisional figure at this stage. Equivalent information is not collected on an in-year basis.

The expenditure recorded in the annual financial returns relates only to the direct costs of health education and promotion departments and specific campaigns organised by or on behalf of the health authorities. Some direct costs of clinical medical officers, health visitors and other health professionals (for the time they are engaged on specific health education work in the community) are included but the financial returns do not capture all expenditure related to health promotion in its broadest sense. For example, it would be impracticable to identify and cost all health education and promotional advice routinely provided during the course of hospital consultations and treatment.

Patient Statistics

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number of *(a)* in-patients, *(b)* day patients and *(c)* total patients treated in the year 1990-91 on a basis (i) comparable to the published figures for 1989-90 and (ii) comparable to the figures published in the review of the six months April to September 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is in the table. Figures published in the Department of Health "Statistical Bulletin" are from the KP70 annual statistical return. Those used in the review of the six months April to September 1991 are from NHSME regional monitoring returns. These two returns are collected through different processes and some groups of patients are included in one but not the others (eg. well babies who appear in the KP70 returns but not the NHSME returns). Discussions are held with regions each year to validate the difference between the two sets of figures.

('000s)

	KP70 1990-91[1]	*NHSME Returns 1990-91*[1]
In-patient cases	5,779	5,717
Day cases	1,236	1,258
TOTAL	7,015	6,975

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[1] Provisional.

National Census

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are made for the sale of information obtained through the official national census.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 February 1992]:* Printed census reports to Parliament are sold at HMSO bookshops. Other statistical information for areas in England and Wales from the census is available on request to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. A charge is made to recover the cost of extracting such information from the census data base and presenting it in the form required.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information obtained through the national census is distributed in any form which gives details of postal codes.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 February 1992]:* Statistics from the 1991 census will be available for postcode sectors (containing about 2,000 households each on average). An enumeration district to postcode directory will be available for England and Wales, enabling census users to relate statistics for census enumeration districts to the aggregations of postcode units which most nearly approximate those districts. Census users will also be able to request statistics for areas defined by them as particular aggregations of postcodes. These will be provided only if the areas requested are sufficiently large, and sufficiently different from standard areas, for confidentiality to be safeguarded.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what income is received from the sale of information obtained by the national census for the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 February 1992]:* The income received by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys from the sale of census statistics over the five financial years from April 1986 to March 1991 is as follows:

Financial year	*Income (£ thousand)*
1986-87	346
1987-88	194
1988-89	110
1989-90	62
1990-91	53

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many organisations or companies have directly purchased information collected by the national census in the last 10 years; and what public record is kept of such usage.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 February 1992]:* In the last 10 years the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has met approximately 12,000 requests for census statistics from central and local government, health authorities, public corporations and banks, and from insurance, retail and other commercial companies, and the academic sector.

Records of all sales of specially commissioned statistics are held by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for public viewing in St. Catherine's house, London and at Titchfield in Hampshire.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Spending Power

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the net weekly spending power of a man, wife and two children aged 13 and 16 years, and that of a single parent family with two children aged 13 and 16 years whose income in both cases is *(a)* £150 per week, *(b)* £175 per week and *(c)* £200 per week, on the same basis as shown for the two-parent family in the taxation benefit model tables pages 108-110.

Mr. Jack: The information is given in the tables. All assumptions are set out in the published tax/benefit model tables. Each family is assumed to live in council property appropriate to its size and to pay estimated average rent and community charge.

In recognition of the fact that lone parents have different employment opportunities available to them compared with couples, income tax personal allowances and the adult credit within family credit is the same for both family types. In addition a lone parent receives one parent benefit at £5.60 a week.

It should be noted that the results in the tables remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people, and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The tables use hypothetical rents, so they do not reflect the full range of housing costs which people can pay.

My hon. Friend may further wish to note that the tax/benefit model tables show the total net income on income support for each family type and this information has been included in the tables.

Married Couple with Two Children Aged 13 and 16 years
Tax Threshold = £96·44 *Basic Tax Rate = 25 per cent.*
Total Net Income on Income Support = £154·46
Net Income after Rent and Community Charge on Income Support = £119·03
(£ Per Week)

Gross earnings	*Tax*	*NI*	*Take Home Pay*	*Family Credit*	*Child Benefit*	*Rent*	*Rent Rebate*	*Community Charge*	*Community Charge Benefit*	*Total Net Income*	*Net Income after Rent and Community Charge*
150·00	13·39	9·86	126·75	29·30	16·75	26·03	0·00	9·40	0·33	173·13	137·70
175·00	19·64	12·11	143·25	17·75	16·75	26·03	0·00	9·40	0·00	177·75	142·32
200·00	25·89	14·36	159·75	6·20	16·75	26·03	0·00	9·40	0·00	182·70	147·27

Single Person with Two Children Aged 13 and 16 years
Tax Threshold = £96·44 *Basic Tax Rate = 25 per cent.*
Total Net Income on Income Support = £132·55
Net Income after Rent and Community Charge on Income Support = £101·82
(£ Per Week)

Gross earnings	*Tax*	*NI*	*Take Home Pay*	*Family Credit*	*Child Benefit*	*Rent*	*Rent Rebate*	*Community Charge*	*Community Charge Benefit*	*Total Net Income*	*Net Income after Rent and Community Charge*
150·00	13·39	9·86	126·75	29·30	22·35	26·03	0·06	4·70	0·00	178·40	147·67
175·00	19·64	12·11	143·25	17·75	22·35	26·03	0·00	4·70	0·00	183·35	152·62
200·00	25·89	14·36	159·75	6·20	22·35	26·03	0·00	4·70	0·00	188·30	157·57

Claimants (Compensation)

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will amend his Department's standing instructions in the departmental administrative code that deals with compensation for benefit claimants to include automatic payment to compensate for pain, suffering and loss of amenity.

Miss Widdecombe: Customers who suffer actual financial loss or whose benefit has been delayed unduly, as a result of clear and unambiguous official error, may receive ex-gratia payments.

Departmental Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how long each computerised system in his Department would take to return to full operation in the event of a disaster.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has carried out a risk assessment for each of its computer systems and has adopted appropriate measures to minimise risks.

In the more important systems for administering social security benefits, high priority is given to business continuity. Computer capacity has deliberately been distributed round a number of linked computer processing centres and the communications network has been designed with sufficient flexibility and capacity to minimise the disruption caused by serious breakdown from whatever cause, and priorities have been established to reduce as far as possible the impact on the service to the public.

Timescales for recovery vary according to the cause of the disruption and the system involved for example whether it is a single office, a single system or a complete computer centre. Procedures and equipment have been developed to enable records to be reconstructed from archive material and to transfer workloads from operational computers to those used for non-operational work, such as systems for testing new developments and for maintenance.

These recovery procedures are tested regularly.

Residential Homes (Fees)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the additional cost to the DSS budget of providing a social fund community care grant to bridge the financial difference between the residential fees charged by residential nursing homes and the current levels of DSS residential/nursing home fees in circumstances where providing such a grant would allow a patient on NHS acute hospital bed to vacate their hospital bed and accept a place in the receiving residential/nursing home.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not available.

Pensioners

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning the reduction of the state pension of persons spending more than six weeks in hospital.

Miss Widdecombe: In the last year we have received just over 200 letters on this subject.

Management Facilities

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer 3 February, *Official Report*, column *98*, if he will list the current operational documents which are available to hon. Members on *(a)* FAMIS, *(b)* interim resource management facilities and *(c)* the devolved personnel management system.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not normal practice or policy for internal operational documents to be lodged in the Library or the Public Information Office.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *160*, if he will make it his policy to continue to list in the *Official Report*, in answer to parliamentary questions, areas where cold weather payments have been made.

Mr. Scott: It remains our firm policy that where information is routinely available in the Library it need not be repeated in the *Official Report*.

Income-related Benefits

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column 92, if he will estimate the offsetting savings on expenditure on income-related benefits, in each case.

Mr. Jack: Based on the latest available information, the estimates are in the table:

	Gross cost *£ million*	*Offsetting savings* *£ million*
Eldest child	355	95
Other children	285	85
Total	640	[1]180

[1] In calculating the net cost of £450 million given in the previous reply, allowance was also made for a further saving of £10 million from making the normal adjustments to child dependency increases payable with certain national insurance benefits.

National Insurance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the percentage of salary paid in national insurance contributions by persons earning annual salaries of £5,000, £15,000, £20,000, £50,000, £100,000 and £200,000 in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1991.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is in the table:

Annual salary £	*NI contributions paid by employees as a percentage of salary* *1979-80*[1] *Per cent.*	*1991-92*[2] *Per cent.*
5,000	6·5	5·2
15,000	3·0	7·7
20,000	2·3	8·1
50,000	0·9	3·3
100,000	0·5	1·6
200,000	0·2	0·8

Note:

[1] Upper earnings limit at 1979-80 level of £7,020 per annum.

[2] Upper earnings limit at today's level of £20,280 per annum.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the *(a)* marginal and *(b)* cumulative reduction in revenue for successive reductions by steps of £10 per week of the upper earnings limit for employees' national insurance contributions from its current level, and corresponding figures for increasing the lower earnings limit by steps of £10 per week.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* The information requested is in the tables.

(a) Upper earnings limit £	*Marginal cost*[1] *£ million*	*Cumulative cost*[1] *£ million*
[2]390	—	—
380	−100	−100
370	−150	−250
360	−150	−400
350	−150	−550
340	−150	−700
330	−200	−900
320	−200	−1,100
310	−200	−1,300
300	−250	−1,550
290	−250	−1,800
280	−250	−2,050
270	−250	−2,300
260	−300	−2,600
250	−300	−2,900
240	−350	−3,250
230	−350	−3,600
220	−400	−4,000
210	−400	−4,400
200	−450	−4,850
190	−450	−5,300
180	−500	−5,800
170	−500	−6,300
160	−550	−6,850
150	−550	−7,400
140	−600	−8,000
130	−600	−8,600
120	−650	−9,250
110	−650	−9,900
100	−650	−10,550
90	−700	−11,250
80	−700	−11,950
70	−700	−12,650
60	−750	−13,400

[1] Employees' contributions only; assumes an unchanged basis for employers' contributions.

[2] Current limit.

(b) Lower earnings limit £	*£ millions* [1]*Marginal cost*	[1]*Cumulative cost*
[2]52	—	—
62	−600	−600
72	−600	−1,200
82	−550	−1,750
92	−550	−2,300
102	−550	−2,850
112	−550	−3,400

(b) Lower earnings limit £	£ millions	
	[1]Marginal cost	[1]Cumulative cost
122	−550	−3,950
132	−550	−4,500
142	−500	−5,000
152	−500	−5,500
162	−500	−6,000
172	−500	−6,500
182	−500	−7,000
192	−500	−7,500
202	−450	−7,950
212	−450	−8,400
222	−450	−8,850
232	−400	−9,250
242	−400	−9,650
252	−400	−10,050
262	−350	−10,400
272	−350	−10,750
282	−350	−11,100
292	−300	−11,400
302	−300	−11,700
312	−300	−12,000
322	−300	−12,300
332	−250	−12,550
342	−250	−12,800
352	−250	−13,050
362	−250	−13,300
372	−200	−13,500
382	−200	−13,700

[1] Employees' contributions only; assumes an unchanged basis for employers' contributions.

[2] Current limit.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people would be affected by a reduction in the ceiling of employees' national insurance payments for each £10 per week reduction and cumulatively at each stage up to a reduction of £150 per week; and what would be the cost and cumulative cost in each case.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* The information requested is in the table.

	(Thousands)		*(£ millions)*	
Upper earnings limit (£)	*Numbers affected by change in UEL*	*Cumulative effect*	*Marginal cost*[1]	*Cumulative cost*[1]
390	[2]—	—	—	—
380	200	200	−100	−100
370	300	500	−150	−250
360	300	800	−150	−400
350	300	1,100	−150	−550
340	300	1,400	−150	−700
330	400	1,800	−200	−900
320	400	2,200	−200	−1,100
310	400	2,600	−200	−1,300
300	400	3,000	−250	−1,550
290	400	3,400	−250	−1,800
280	500	3,900	−250	−2,050
270	500	4,400	−250	−2,300
260	500	4,900	−300	−2,600
250	500	5,400	−300	−2,900
240	500	5,900	−350	−3,250

[1] Employees' contributions only; assumes an unchanged basis for employers' contributions.

[2] Current limit.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to change the threshold for small employers' relief under the statutory sick pay scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Employers whose total national insurance contributions liability is below a certain level, currently £15,000 are able to revert to 100 per cent. reimbursement of statutory sick pay paid after the employee has been sick for more than six weeks. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has reviewed this figure and proposes, subject to parliamentary approval, that it should be increased to £16,000 from April.

Rent Arrears

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether arrangements to recover rent arrears from local authority tenants by charging rent supplements to individual tenants with rent arrears in addition to their normal rent qualify for housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: Housing benefit is designed to help people meet their current rent liabilities. It is clearly inappropriate that individual rent supplements levied on tenants to recover their arrears of rent, which may not originally have been met through housing benefit, should now qualify for it. I have therefore today laid before Parliament the Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1992, in order to put beyond doubt that such supplements should not form part of eligible rent for housing benefit purposes.

Medical Examinations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants were examined by doctors acting for his Department over the last 12 months for the purpose of assessing *(a)* attendance allowance, *(b)* mobility allowance and *(c)* attendance allowance where the claimant was aged over 65 years; what was the average fee paid to doctors for such examinations; and what was the overall cost to his Department of these examinations.

Mr. Scott *[pursuant to his reply, 21 January 1992, c. 175]:* The following information, in the second paragraph was incorrect,

"There were 262,000 claims for mobility allowance."

The correct information is as follows:

"There were 231,000 claims for mobility allowance."

NORTHERN IRELAND

Mourne House, Newcastle

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have been held with Age Concern concerning the transfer of Mourne house, Newcastle, from the ownership of the Eastern health and social services board.

Mr. Hanley: I understand that the Eastern health and social services board have had discussions in the past with Age Concern about the possibility of leasing Mourne house to it and that these discussions concluded without agreement. The board will be considering proposals from the local unit of management for the provision of services for the elderly in the Newcastle area at its next meeting on 13 February.

119. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what dates the Eastern health and social services board carried out renovations to Mourne house, Newcastle, between 1 April 1973 to 31 March 1991; and if he will specify the nature of those renovations.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is not collected centrally. The hon. Gentleman may wish to contact the chairman of the Eastern health and social services board, Mr. Norman Ferguson, CBE.

District Nurses

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by health authority the number of full-time equivalent district nursing posts and the number of potential elderly domiciliary clients, as defined by the Department of the Environment under section 80 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, for years 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991.

Mr. Hanley: This legislation does not extend to Northern Ireland.

Moneyreagh

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the population of Moneyreagh village in 1981 and 1991; and how many new dwellings, for which full planning permission has been issued, are still to be constructed at Moneyreagh.

Mr. Needham: The population for Moneyreagh village in 1981 was 879. The corresponding figure for 1991 will not be available until the autumn.

Within Moneyreagh village (ie excluding the rural area) there is approval for 120 houses on which no work has started. There are 13 houses under construction at present.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Widgery Tribunal

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Attorney-General (1) if he will list the precedents for examining the evidence at tribunals to discover if all the conclusions remain valid; and if he will re-examine the Widgery tribunal on the same basis;

(2) what procedural methods are available to be used for an official reconsideration and examination of the forensic evidence presented to the tribunal on the deaths in Northern Ireland on 30 January 1972.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have been asked to reply.

I am not aware of any precedent for the re-examination of evidence presented to a tribunal held under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921 such as that conducted by Lord Widgery into the tragic events in Londonderry on 30 January 1972. The Government accept the conclusion reached by the Royal Commission on Tribunals of Inquiry (Cmnd 3121) in 1966, and endorsed in the White Paper "Tribunals of Inquiry set up under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921" (Cmnd 5313) in 1973, that the findings of such tribunals should be treated as final.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Computer Safety

Mr. Hain: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will seek to establish a Select Committee to monitor computer safety.

Mr. MacGregor: No.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

(COCOM)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of COCOM.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The rationale for COCOM's existence has been the strategic threat posed to the west by a number of countries, mainly the former Warsaw pact and China.

COCOM is now actively considering its future role in light of the changed circumstances of the countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. It is too early to present firm conclusions.

CSCE

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the outcome of the recent conference of foreign Ministers of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At the meeting of the CSCE Council in Prague on 30 and 31 January, Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to pursue the objectives set out in the "Charter of Paris for a New Europe". They adopted the Prague document on the further development of CSCE institutions and structures to support this aim. The Ministers welcomed ten republics of the former Soviet Union as new participating states of the CSCE, and granted observer status to Croatia and Slovenia. At my suggestion, Ministers decided on the early despatch of a rapporteur mission to Armenia and Azerbaijan, and called for an interim report on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he took part in party-political activities in addition to official duties on his visits to Hong Kong in April and September 1991.

Mr. Hurd: I saw fellow Conservatives briefly in Hong Kong in September.

Mr. Abdul Rauf

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Abdul Rauf (Ref: GV160/13294) is going to be issued with a visa to visit the United Kingdom; when Mr. Rauf applied for a visit visa; when his appeal against refusal to grant the visa was upheld; when the high commission in Islamabad was advised to issue the visa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The high commission in Islamabad issued a visit visa to Mr. Abdul Rauf on 12 January 1992.

Mr. Rauf had applied for a visa on 20 August 1989. Following an interview at the high commission on 3 September 1989 his application was refused. He appealed against the refusal decision on 7 November 1989 and the entry clearance officer's explanatory statement was sent to the appellate authorities on 5 December 1989. The high commission heard nothing more until it received a copy of the letter which the hon. Member wrote to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office on 5 November 1991 (which was subsequently transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for action). The high commission then made inquiries of the Home Office who advised, on the 19 December 1991, that the appeal had been allowed on 1 August 1990. On 30 December 1991 the high commission invited Mr. Rauf to call with a view to issuing entry clearance.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Minister of State took part in party-political activities in addition to official duties on his visits to Hong Kong in January, July and December 1991.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My noble Friend, the Minister of State saw fellow Conservatives briefly in Hong Kong in January.

Peru

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss human rights in Peru when he meets Preident Fujimori of Peru on 5 February.

Mr. Garel-Jones: *[pursuant to his reply, 6 February 1992, c. 215]:* The Prime Minister met President Fujimori on 5 February. His discussions covered a wide range of issues of common interest, including human rights.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council held on 3 February.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I represented the United Kingdom at the Foreign Affairs Council on 3 February. The council agreed measures giving the five republics co-operating with Lord Carrington's peace conference—Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Hercegovina and Macedonia—the trade benefits of the former EC-Yugoslavia trade and co-operation agreement. These benefits will extend until the end of 1992.

The council agreed at my suggestion that emergency food should be delivered to cities other than Moscow and St. Petersburg from within the existing EC humanitarian food aid programme for the former Soviet Union. It invited EC Finance Ministers to look at ways of taking forward disbursement of EC food and medical credits for the newly independent states. The council reviewed the outcome of the Washington conference on aid to the former Soviet Union and agreed that the follow-up conference in Lisbon should be carefully prepared. The council agreed a case-by-case approach to negotiating trade and co-operation agreements with the republics of the former Soviet Union and the Baltic states.

The council reviewed the European economic area negotiations in the light of the European Court of Justice's opinion on the proposed judicial arrangements. The council reaffirmed the need to bring the negotiations to an early and successful conclusion.

The council discussed follow-up to the Maastricht Council. It agreed that officials should begin work in Brussels on necessary institutional questions, including establishing the right infrastructure for the provisions in the treaty on a common foreign and security policy and on justice and home affairs. The council agreed to the amendments to the European Coal and Steel Community and European Atomic Energy Community treaties set out in the relevant articles of the treaty on political union.

The council discussed the financial protocols for Syria and Morocco under the new Mediterranean policy in the light of the European Parliament's decision to withhold its assent to these protocols. The Commission presented a communication on export controls on dual-use foods. The council decided to remit this to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further examination.

Ministers agreed that the Organisation of American States should be consulted about the possible denunciation of the Lomé Convention with respect to Haiti. An EC-Paraguay trade and co-operation agreement was signed in the margins of the council. After conciliation with the European Parliament, agreement was reached on the regulations governing the Asia-Latin America programme and EC-investment partners facility.

ENERGY

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he took part in party-political activities in addition to official duties on his visit to Hong Kong in November 1991.

Mr. Wakeham: I saw fellow Conservatives briefly in Hong Kong in November.

TRANSPORT

Bowbelle and Bow Trader

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all the collisions between *(a)* the Bowbelle and bridges, *(b)* the Bowbelle and other vessels, *(c)* the Bow Trader and bridges and *(d)* the Bow Trader and other vessels on the River Thames each year since 1981; and what was the total number of collisions on the Thames in each of those years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The only collisions with a bridge recorded for the subject ships occurred in 1982, when Bowbelle made contact with scaffolding at Cannon street railway bridge, and in 1989 when Bowbelle struck the same bridge immediately after colliding with Marchioness. The information on other collisions and contacts is in the table; it covers all contacts including those with stationary objects as well as other vessels. The last column includes all types of vessel including small craft such as rowing boats.

Year	*Bowbelle*	*Bowtrader*	*All Vessels*
1981	—	4	55
1982	—	1	53
1983	1	1	26
1984	—	—	49
1985	—	2	36
1986	—	—	36
1987	1	1	49
1988	—	1	31
1989	1	—	42
1990	—	—	39
1991	—	—	55
1992	—	1	2

DEFENCE

MOD Harrogate

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *729*, whether his investigations into the relative costs of MOD Harrogate and RAF Wyton have assumed that both establishments will in the future be required to house and support substantial numbers of Royal Air Force uniformed personnel.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes. Substantial numbers of RAF personnel will need to be housed and supported wherever RAF logistic support staffs are stationed.

RAF Units

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *730*, if he will give the reasons why quantitative assessments of changes in capability of selected Royal Air Force units have not been undertaken.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ground forces in Europe are scheduled to undergo extensive change over the coming decade. The assessments of the relative capabilities of British Army units arose from an examination of the implications of these plans for the balance of forces in Europe. Forecast changes in the structure of air forces are less extensive and have not been assessed in the same depth.

Defence Budget

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *729*, if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which he would provide details of the contents of the long-term costings of the defence budget, as referred to in the answer of 2 May 1991, *Official Report*, column *292*.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As made clear in my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement's answer on 2 May 1991, the long term costing is intended for internal planning purposes. Plans for defence expendiure for the period covered by the public expenditure survey are published each autumn. Further information is made available in the "Statement on Defence Estimates". Approval to commit expenditure is subject to separate procedures and information on plans for and progress of individual projects is made available as appropriate.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *730*, what information is held centrally regarding *(a)* higher-level budgets, *(b)* intermediate higher-level budgets and *(c)* basic-level budgets.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information relating to estimated future expenditure is held centrally for higher level budgets and for those intermediate higher level budgets that report directly to top level budgets. Expenditure in the current financial year is monitored centrally for top level budgets.

Defence Budget (BAOR)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the number and names of the higher-level budget holders within the top-level budget held by the Commander-in-Chief British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are three higher level budget holders under the Commander-in-Chief British Army of the Rhine. these are:

Assistant Chief of Staff, General Staff Division 1, Headquarters British Army of the Rhine.

Deputy Chief of Staff, Headquarters British Army of the Rhine, General Staff Division 3.

Assistant Chief of Staff, General Staff Division 4, Headquarters British Army of the Rhine.

Management Strategy

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the release of information on the new management strategy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Within the usual constraints of security and expense, my Department's policy is to be as open as possible in releasing information about the new management strategy. Recent "Statements on the Defence Estimates" and "Defence Open Government Document 89/11" have reported on the strategy. This flow of information will continue.

Financial Planning and Management Group

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the numbers, types and ranks of MoD personnel who are part of the financial planning and management group.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The financial planning and management group of the Ministry of Defence is chaired by the Permanent Under-Secretary and currently includes the Chief of the Defence Staff, Chief of the Naval Staff, Chief of the General Staff, Chief of the Air Staff, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, Chief of Defence Procurement, 2nd Permanent Under-Secretary and Chief Scientific Adviser.

Departmental Plans

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place declassified copies of *(a)* his departmental plan and *(b)* his plan objectives in the Library.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence's departmental plan is intended primarily for internal management and control purposes and is thus not suitable for publication. An essay on the plan was published, however, in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991", Vol. 1, (Cm. 1559) Page 55.

Management Strategy

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce *(a)* new information technology and *(b)* new training programmes fully to realise the benefits of the new management strategy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence is developing strategies for the introduction of further information technology across the Department and has recently let a contract worth in the region of £250 million over five years for a new system in headquarters, known as CHOTS. Training programmes to support the new management strategy are constantly under review and are modified and extended as necessary.

RAF Logistic Support

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 31, January, *Official Report*, column *729*, when the investigations into the consolidation of Royal Air Force logistic support began; when they will be completed; what strategic assessments have been made as part of these investigations; what consulations he has had with his NATO counterparts regarding these investigations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The investigations began following consideration of the PROSPECT study of the reorganisation of MOD headquarters in March 1991. Studies on the future organisation of RAF logistics support are expected to be completed by the summer. The relevant strategic assessments are those underpinning Britain's defence for the 1990s. Within NATO, logistics is a national responsibility and formal consultation with the Alliance is not necessary. We have given a firm undertaking to consult the trade unions and local MPs before decisions are taken.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he took part in party-political activities in addition to official duties on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence meets fellow Conservatives from time to time in the margins of public duties both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 February 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Immigration Appeals

36. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Attorney-General what steps he intends to take to speed up the process of hearing immigration appeals.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor is in the process of appointing an extra three full-time and 25 part-time adjudicators, with a corresponding addition to support staff. The multi-terminal case-tracking computer system is now also in operation.

Serious Fraud Office

37. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to widen the remit of the Serious Fraud Office; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The statutory remit of the Serious Fraud Office is to investigate and prosecute suspected offences involving serious complex fraud. I do not consider any revision necessary.

38. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Attorney-General what consideration has been given to the introduction of performance targets for the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office annual report for 1990-1991 set out performance targets for the investigative stages and completion of cases. The Serious Fraud Office is developing further performance indicators.

Alexander Saharievski

Mr. Alton: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the case of the abduction of Alexander Saharievski from his home in Liverpool.

The Attorney-General: Both the United Kingdom and Yugoslavia, to which Alexander Saharievski was taken by his father, have signed and ratified the Hague convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction. An obstacle to the making of an application for Alexander's return to this country was presented by the fact that Yugoslavia has not yet been able to designate a central authority for the processing of applications under the convention. However, the staff of the child abduction unit of the Lord Chancellor's Department, which provides the central authority for England and Wales, and of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have been able to assist in finding a lawyer in Yugoslavia for Alexander's mother and in securing the agreement of the Macedonian Ministry of Justice to accept an application under the convention and the urgent assistance of the local authorities in Yugoslavia in tracing Alexander's current whereabouts. Staff will continue to assist in any way they can, and it is hoped that it will not be long before Alexander can be reunited with his mother.

Solicitors

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on time taken from receipt of claim to the payment of solicitors in the No. 3 (southern) legal aid area.

The Attorney-General: Details on the time taken from receipt of claim to the payment of solicitors in the No. 3 legal aid area are kept in the form of percentages of set targets for the board. Legal aid area No. 3 experienced difficulties early last year but these have now been addressed and the area is now regularly surpassing its targets. Its oldest claim awaiting assessment and payment dates from 9 December 1991.

Figures are available for a 12-month period and are set out in the table.

Payment within 6 weeks

	Civil *Per cent.*	*Criminal* *Per cent.*	*Other bills* *Per cent.*
Office target for payment within 6 weeks	65	80	95
Actual achievement over last 3 months	90·1	97·2	97·5
Actual achievement over last 6 months	77·9	94·7	96
Actual achievement over last 12 months	64·8	92·7	94·3

NATIONAL FINANCE

General Fund

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the amount of the subsidy that was collected into the general fund in 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Mellor: Her Majesty's Treasury does not possess a general fund.

Company Directors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all those companies where he has a right to appoint directors, whether as a result of special shares or otherwise; how those powers of appointment have been exercised, and whom he has appointed, since 1987.

Mr. Maude: There are no companies to which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has the right to appoint directors.

Personal Information

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to allow a taxpayer to consent to, or be aware of, those uses and disclosures of personal information that are not obvious at the time the taxpayer provides the information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: None. The circumstances in which information concerning taxpayers held by the Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise may be disclosed outside those departments without the consent of the taxpayer are very limited.

Under section 182 of the Finance Act 1989 it is an offence for tax officials to make disclosures other than in the course of their duties. The circumstances in which such disclosures might be authorised are limited to occasions when the confidentiality obligation is specifically overridden by statute or where a serious crime such as murder or treason is involved.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will include in the citizens charter plans to ensure that the citizen's consent is obtained prior to the use and disclosure of personal information relating to the citizen that are not obvious at the time the citizen provides the information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I have no plans to include such a proposal in the citizens charter.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he intends to take relating to the tax-exempt special savings account regulations in the light of the seventh report from the Data Protection Registrar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: No action is necessary. The TESSA regulations are well suited to their intended purpose. The information requirements have been kept to a minimum to make the scheme as simple as possible. Use of the national insurance number as a tax reference is long established. As the report of the Data Protection Registrar acknowledges, the Inland Revenue has made it clear that such information may be used only for the purpose of validating applications.

Income Statistics

Mr. Carr: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many self-employed people had incomes *(a)* below £3,000, *(b)* between £3,000 and £5,900, *(c)* between £5,900 and £15,000, *(d)* between £15,000 and £20,000, *(e)* between £20,000 and £25,000, *(f)* between £25,000 and £33,000, *(g)* between £33,000 and £40,000, *(h)* between £40,000 and £50,000 and *(i)* above £50,000 in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: Estimates, based on projections of information from 1989-90 are as follows:

Estimated numbers of taxpaying individuals with main source of income from self-employment

Annual gross income[1] (£)	*Number in 1990-91 (000s)*	*Number in 1991-92 (000s)*
1- 3,000	0	0
3,000- 5,900	340	280
5,900-15,000	1,500	1,490
15,000-20,000	350	410
20,000-25,000	180	200
25,000-33,000	150	180
33,000-40,000	70	80
40,000-50,000	60	70
Over 50,000	120	140
Total[2]	2,800	2,800

[1] Income from all sources

[2] To the nearest 100,000

Shareholders

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) on 14 November 1990, *Official Report*, column *150*, as to the number of individual shareholders retaining shares in each of the concerns privatised since 1979.

Mr. Maude: The table shows the number of shareholdings in each of the companies privatised since 1979. Where Her Majesty's Government retained a shareholding on privatisation, together with the size and date of any subsequent share disposals, this has also been shown.

Shareholdings[1] in privatised and former Government-controlled companies

Company	*Date of privatisation*	*Size of share register*			*Proportion of shares retained by HMG Per cent.*	*Proportion and dates of subsequent disposals*
		Initial	*Highest since privatisation*	*Current*		
British Petroleum	[2]December 1977	n.a.	621,159 (December 1988)	589,183 (31 December 1990)	51	[2]5·17 per cent./November 1979: 7·12 per cent./September 1983: 31·5 per cent./September 1987: 0·09 per cent./October 1990 on 1 January 1991 HMG held about 1·48 per cent.
British Aerospace	February 1981	27,179	120,200 (December 1986)	91,700 (31 December 1990)	48·43	48·43 per cent./10 May 1985
Cable and Wireless	October 1981	27,320	210,994 (31 March 1986)	166,179 (31 March 1990)	50·64	27·54 per cent./November 1983: 23·1 per cent./December 1985
Amersham International	February 1982	10,051	8,601 (June 1982)	5,904 (31 May 1991)	nil	
NFC	February 1982	10,300	42,000 (October 1988)	60,000 (February 1992)	nil	
Britoil	November 1982	37,257	245,556 (31 December 1985)	owned by BP	49	49 per cent./8 August 1985
Associated British Ports	February 1983	37,285	12,321 (July 1989)	12,000 (31 December 1989)	48·5	48·5 per cent./17 April 1984
Enterprise Oil	June 1984	13,695	14,166 (June 1985)	10,811 (31 December 1990)	nil	

Company	Date of privatisation	Size of share register Initial	Size of share register Highest since privatisation	Size of share register Current	Proportion of shares retained by HMG Per cent.	Proportion and dates of subsequent disposals
Jaguar	July 1984	125,000	64,126 (November 1984)	owned by Ford	[4]nil	
BT	November 1984	2,139,520	1,649,722 (30 November 1985)	2,931,570 (1 February 1992)	49·8	0·8 per cent./December 1987: 27·5 per cent./November 1991
British Gas	December 1986	4,407,079	3,112,000 (30 April 1987)	2,285,325 (31 March 1991)	3·3	1·6 per cent./January 1990: 1·6 per cent./July 1990
British Airways	February 1987	1,200,000	450,000 (July 1987)	314,039 (15 May 1990)	2·5	1 per cent./June 1987: 1 per cent./March 1990
Rolls-Royce	May 1987	1,988,966	925,000 (December 1987)	738,659 (31 December 1989)	0·4	0·4 per cent. sold during 1987
BAA	July 1987	2,187,500	1,350,000 (November 1987)	798,643 (1 June 1990)	4·36	1·42 per cent./August 1990
British Steel	December 1988	650,553	419,727 (1 April 1989)	318,025 (23 August 1990)	0·05	0·04 per cent. disposed of during 1989. On 12 November 1990 HMG held about 0·002 per cent.
Water and Sewerage Companies	December 1989	[5]2,650,000	[6]1,318,352 (June 1990)	[6]1,106,564 (27 June 1991)	1·62	
Regional Electricity Companies	December 1990	[5]12,750,000	n.a.	[6]3,400,000 (20 September 1991)	n.a.	
Generating Companies	March 1991	[7]1,910,000	n.a.	[6]1,700,000 (January 1992)	40	
Scottish Electricity Companies	June 1991	[8]1,840,000	n.a.	[6]2,100,000 (January 1992)	3·5	

Notes:

[1] For single company privatisations, these figures are not an exact guide to the number of shareholders because some shareholdings are held jointly in more than one name.

[2] Her Majesty's Government obtained a majority holding in 1914 but this never reached 100 per cent. The 1977 sale is shown as the first disposal of recent times.

[3] These proportions do not sum to 51 per cent. because of rights issues.

[4] Subsidiary of BL plc.

[5] The offer allowed for holdings by individuals in any or all of the companies in the offer and therefore holders may appear on more than one register.

[6] Shareholders may appear on the register of more than one company.

[7] The offer required public applicants to apply for shares in both companies.

[8] The offer required non-customer public applicants to apply for shares in both companies.

Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will bring up to date table F8 of the January 1992 issue of the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics."

Mr. Mellor: The information for the table in question is provided by the International Monetary Fund. I regret that it has not been forthcoming from that source for recent quarters.

Manufactured Goods (Import Content)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish his estimate of the import content of goods manufactured in the United Kingdom in 1970, 1979, 1985 and each of the years from 1989 to 1991.

Mr. Mellor: The latest available analysis is for 1985. Central Statistical Office's published input—output tables for that year and the two earlier years (1) show the imported and domestic content of manufactures. These publications are available in the Library.

(1) "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1985" table 4, "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1979" table K, "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1970" table K.

CIVIL SERVICE

Recruitment and Assessment Services

Dr. Marek: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what plans he has for redundancy of staff at Recruitment and Assessment Services or any other civil service agency.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* In view of the financial position of the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency the chief executive is looking at all options for improvement. Staff numbers are being reduced in various ways, including transfers to other Departments and the offer of early retirement. Other measures will need to be taken if these prove insufficient. There can be no undertaking at this stage that there may not be a requirement for redundancies.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on the financial position of the Recruitment and Assessment Services civil service agency; and when he expects a report to be laid before Parliament.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* Because of a sharp fall in the recruitment business placed with the Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency, it is unlikely to cover its full costs by income from its customers in its first year. However, the agency aims to break even in the first three years of trading. The agency will publish its first annual report and accounts later in the year.

THE ARTS

Arts Spending (South Hams)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister for the Arts what was the amount of public subsidy spent on the arts in the South Hams parliamentary constituency in each of the last three years.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* The amount spent by the South West regional arts board in the South Hams parliamentary constituency in each of the last three years is as follows:

	£
1988-89	36,408
1989-90	33,824
1990-91	37,433

ENVIRONMENT

Community Charge

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities in rank order of the additional community charge levied in 1991-92 to cover non-collection, showing which party, if any, is in overall control.

Mr. Key: I am arranging for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount was subtracted from the standard spending assessments of London boroughs and the City of London, to reflect the fact that those authorities do not provide support for public transport, in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Key: The amount subtracted for 1991-92 was £160·037 million. For 1992-93 a different approach has been used which involves separate formulae to reflect the fact that public transport support is provided centrally in London but not in the rest of the country. As a result there is no comparable 1992-93 figure.

Cash Limits

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes any changes to his Department's cash limits for Property Holdings for 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: Yes, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII vote 7 will be increased by a token £1,000. Excess receipts, which were to be surrendered to the Consolidated Fund, will be used to offset increased expenditure on freehold acquisitions, accommodation services for the Houses of Parliament and a shortfall of property disposal receipts; the supplementary estimate will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure. The running cost limit of £57,031,000 will be reduced by £2,227,000 to £54,804,000 as a result of delays in filling vacant posts and to offset increased expenditure on other administrative subheads.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limit on Property Services Agency Services vote in 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII vote 13 will be increased by £135,105,000 from £90,947,000 to £226,052,000. £50,000,000 of the increase will be offset by receipts from other Departments relating to the recovery of prior years' works expenditure. The remainder will be charged to the reserve. There will, therefore, be no addition to the planned total of public expenditure.

The increase will enable PSAS to bring into account in its 1991-92 appropriation accounts any works contractors bills which will be paid by PSAS on behalf of other vote funded Departments but which, in the event, it will not have recovered in time for inclusion with those Departments' accounts.

Waste Water

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total percentage of waste water *(a)* treated at inland works and receiving secondary or tertiary treatment, *(b)* treated at inland works and receiving primary treatment or less, *(c)* discharged at sea through properly designed long outfalls and *(d)* discharged into the sea without treatment in each water authority area in England.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the following three reports: House of Lords' Select Committee on the European Communities, Session 1990-91, 10th report, "Municipal Waste Water Treatment"—House of Lords paper 50-I of 14 May 1991; the study of coastal and sewage discharges carried out for my Department by Consultants in Environmental Services, a copy of which is in the Library; and "Waterfacts 1990" published by the Water Services Association, a copy of which is also in the Library.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will initiate new measures within his Department, in conjunction with English Heritage, to draw up a scheme whereby the reasons for the listing of buildings are fully examined when decisions are both positive and negative.

Mr. Yeo: The Secretary of State has published national criteria for listing in DOE circular 8/87 and takes careful account of English Heritage's advice, and of any other representations, before reaching his decisions. When a building is listed, the list entry identifies the main features which are considered to justify the listing. When a building is not listed, reasons for the decision are given; but whether a building is or is not of special architectural or historic interest will inevitably often be a matter of judgment.

Manchester Concert Hall

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement about the funding of the proposed new concert hall in Manchester.

Sir George Young: The Government have already set aside £15 million towards the cost of this project in the budget of the Central Manchester development corporation. Despite a proposed contribution from Manchester city council, there remains a funding gap. Discussions are continuing about how to bridge it.

Emissions (Central London)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the air quality results for central London for June and December each year from 1980 to the present for carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide and low-level ozone and any other relevant measurements for which he has results.

Mr. Baldry: The table shows the average figures for the months of June and December at the central London site, with the maximum hourly level reached in that month for carbon monoxide (CO), sulphur dioxide (SO_2), ozone (O_3) and nitrogen dioxide (NO_2). No measurement data in this format are available for carbon dioxide.

CO ppm

Year	*Average*		*Maximum*	
	June	*December*	*June*	*December*
1980	0·6	0·9	3·1	4·6
1981	0·7	1·7	3·8	7·1
1982	0·6	1·0	3·3	3·4
1983	—	1·0	—	6·2
1984	0·8	1·4	4·3	11·5
1985	0·5	0·7	3·2	4·0
1986	0·7	—	3·8	—
1987	—	—	—	—
1988	0·7	1·5	2·5	8·1
1989	0·9	1·9	2·8	13·1
1990	0·9	1·5	4·2	11·7
1991	1·1	2·2	3·6	13·3

SO2 ppb

Year	*Average*		*Maximum*	
	June	*December*	*June*	*December*
1980	26	21	150	152
1981	15	58	98	339
1982	24	36	281	238
1983	17	34	142	133
1984	16	16	295	379
1985	7	7	31	16
1986	16	16	178	68
1987	7	14	47	153
1988	6	14	76	57
1989	10	15	125	190
1990	9	11	86	72
1991	5	18	54	144

O3 ppb

Year	*Average*		*Maximum*	
	June	*December*	*June*	*December*
1980	14	2	42	10
1981	13	2	63	16
1982	—	5	—	23
1983	13	—	49	—
1984	17	1	68	7
1985	22	12	84	59
1986	21	5	105	26
1987	6	3	35	21
1988	10	4	59	29
1989	19	5	108	33
1990	12	7	67	30
1991	13	4	47	18

NO2 ppb

Year	*Average*		*Maximum*	
	June	*December*	*June*	*December*
1980	32	34	88	72
1981	—	42	—	103
1982	40	38	98	78
1983	37	39	101	114
1984	42	—	156	—
1985	34	29	108	75
1986	33	36	141	77
1987	37	38	90	239
1988	33	33	100	92
1989	40	34	108	125
1990	28	39	86	150
1991	34	56	84	423

Poll Tax

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has as to the percentage of those people taken to court for failure to pay poll tax that have *(a)* been receiving rebate and *(b)* have been on the maximum rebate of 80 per cent.

Mr. Key: My Department does not collect this information.

Montreal Protocol

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake immediately to sign on behalf of Her Majesty's Government the Montreal protocol treaty on substances that deplete the ozone layer.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom was among the first 25 signatories to the Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer in September 1987. The United Kingdom ratified the amendment to the protocol in December 1991.

Housing (Capital Funding)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to give tenant-control initiatives similar status to initiatives such as housing action trusts, the city challenge and estate action schemes when allocating capital funding.

Mr. Key: No. Housing action trusts, estate action and city challenge are all ways of better targeting resources, and tenant management or control of housing estates is one important ingredient in them. It would not be right to treat tenant control in isolation as a means of targeting scarce capital resources: tenants taking on such responsibilities need the support that comes from sound management, strategies and policies.

Urban Programme (Bradford)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the allocated amounts for each item in the urban programme funding for Bradford announced on 16 January which make up the total of £4·491 million.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 5 February 1992]*: Bradford's initial allocation for 1992-93 is as follows:

	£ million
Capital	3·234
Revenue	1·257
Total	4·491

The authority will receive its final allocation when its urban programme is approved by the Department.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sunday Trading

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been on public order and trespass charges of persons protesting at breaches of the Sunday trading laws in the last six months.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not collected centrally.

Crime Statistics (Warrington)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give crime figures for Warrington for each year since 1979 in the categories: offences against the person, sexual offences against women, robbery, burglary (domestic), burglary (other), theft of vehicle, theft from vehicle, theft of pedal cycles, theft from shops, obtaining property by deception, criminal damage, drug trafficking and other crimes.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Credit Card Fraud

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the amount of police time that is spent on investigating credit card fraud; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the amount of credit card fraud in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: A Home Office report "The Prevention of Cheque and Credit Card Fraud" published in June last year, estimated that the losses to the major retail banks from all forms of "plastic card" fraud amounted to £121 million in 1990; of this sum, about £68 million was attributable to credit card fraud.

My right hon. Friend met senior financial sector representatives on 26 June and 15 October last year to discuss initiatives for tackling credit card and cheque fraud. He indicated that he wished to see as rapid progress as possible. It is intended that a further meeting should take place soon.

Eavesdropping Devices

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what legitimate purposes he considers eavesdropping devices may be used by the general public as indicated in his letter to the hon. Member for Newport, West of 18 January.

Mrs. Rumbold: Devices that amplify and transmit sound can be used for entirely innocuous purposes including birdwatching, monitoring the sleep of children or aiding those whose hearing is impaired.

Magistrates Court Houses

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the policy guidelines for the closure of magistrates courthouses; and if he will make a statement on the position of the Government with regard to the local provision of justice.

Mr. John Patten: As part of their management responsibilities, magistrates courts committees, in consultation with their paying local authorities, must keep under review the number and location of their courthouses, paying close attention to the amount of work which is undertaken at them. It would be a mistake to think that arguments of efficiency would inevitably draw a committee towards closing smaller courthouses or that keeping courthouses open, whatever the circumstances, must inevitably be in the interests of providing a good quality of service for court users.

So far as efficiency is concerned, in some cases it is clearly very difficult to justify keeping a courthouse open. There are a number of courthouses throughout the country that are used for only a limited period each week or even more infrequently, and which are costly in various ways to maintain. Some are only a short distance from other courthouses which have spare capacity.

On the other hand, courts committees need to approach issues of efficiency in a broad and not a narrow way, recognising the interdependence of criminal justice agencies, practitioners and the courts. Committees will need to take account of the possible effects of a closure on the operation of other local services. It is also very important for efficiency improvements to be pursued across the whole range of magistrates courts operations, and not simply in relation to courthouse accommodation. Courthouses are an important local resource and should not be proposed for closure because other savings require more effort to achieve.

But local justice does not and cannot mean that every town or community throughout England and Wales should have its own courthouse. It is also important that courthouses should offer good standards of facilities and service. Unfortunately many courthouses are old or unsuitable buildings, lacking even basic facilities for court users. It would simply not be realistic or affordable to expect that all could be brought up to an acceptable standard. Courts committees will need to consider the balance of advantage between maintaining unsatisfactory courthouses and providing good facilities and accommodation through selective closures.

Each courts committee will obviously also need to take into account the amount of grant within the cash limit for its area. Courts committees can themselves influence that amount: the arrangements for the distribution of grant announced on 18 October are dynamic and not static. So if a higher volume of cases is completed in an area through improvements in efficiency and court management, the proportion of total grant available for that area will increase. This might enable the committee to maintain a courthouse which would otherwise be at risk of closure. The more that courthouses are productively used, the stronger the case for their retention.

The Justices of the Peace Act 1979 provides for a paying authority to appeal to the Secretary of State if it opposes a committee's decision to close a courthouse. All such appeals are considered on the individual merits of the case and in the light of all relevant local circumstances. In addition to looking carefully at details of the grounds for the appeal, we look specifically at the long-term savings to be made, both in terms of running costs, whether they are realisable, as well as the cost of repairs and refurbishment that would otherwise have been met from capital grant; the cost penalties, particularly travelling costs, that would arise for all categories of court users; and the accessibility of alternative courthouses, particularly by public transport.

As will be clear from the Home Secretary's recent reply on the future organisation of the service—20 December 1991, *Official Report*, columns *250-51*—the Government are fully committed to the principle that the magistrates courts are a quality local service, serving local communities. Since 1979 the Home Office has authorised building projects which provide 402 courtrooms at a total cost of about £350 million; over the next five years we expect to see a further 155 new courtrooms. Resources are, of course, limited; but it is important that there should be a network of courts, so that court users do not face unreasonable travelling difficulties and that the principle that magistrates are drawn from local communities is not weakened. But how these objectives are best met is a matter initially for local judgment.

Security Service (Access to Information)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce proposals for legislation to allow an independent person, with the relevant security clearance, to access on behalf of a citizen the personal information held by the security service in order to assess whether the information is relevant for the purpose of national security and, if appropriate, to make representations to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the Security Service Act 1989 which established the Security Service Tribunal. The tribunal investigates complaints about the service from members of the public. If the tribunal finds that a complainant has been the subject of inquiries by the service it is required to investigate whether the service had reasonable grounds for instituting or continuing inquiries about the complainant in the discharge of its functions. If the tribunal determines that the service did not have reasonable grounds for instituting or continuing inquiries, it is required to notify the complainant that it has made a determination in his favour, and to make a report of its findings to the Secretary of State and to the Security Service Commissioner. In such circumstances, the tribunal may also order inquiries by the service about the complainant to be ended and any records relating to such inquiries to be destroyed, and they may direct the Secretary of State to pay compensation to the complainant.

Sound Advantage

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received about the Royal National Institute for the Deaf's subsidiary Sound Advantage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Secretary has not received any representations. This is primarily a matter for the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales. I understand from the Charity Commissioners that they have received some representations and that they have met with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf to discuss the charity's relationship with Sound Advantage, a commercial company which is not part of the institute.

Crime Costs

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated total cost of crime per annum.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 6 February 1992]*: No reliable estimate of the total cost of crime is available. The report of the working group on the cost of crime in 1988—available in the Library of the House—gives various costs of different aspects of crime but states that these costs overlap and cannot be added to make a total. A recent CBI-Crime Concern report estimated the costs of crime to business to be around £10 billion per year: any realistic assessment of the total costs of crime generally would have to take into account the personal and social damage which it causes.

PRIME MINISTER

Clearance Procedures

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 3 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *94*, whether those employed in executive agencies are also required to seek clearance before taking up posts with outside organisations and companies; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Yes, where appropriate.

Iraq (United Nations Inspections)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister when Her Majesty's Government received the appeal from the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency for supplementary funds to continue the United Nations special commission on inspection in Iraq; and what response was made to the appeal.

The Prime Minister: No appeal has been received.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what steps have been taken by Her Majesty's Government to halt the geographical proliferation of nuclear weapons by nuclear-armed states to their military allies.

The Prime Minister: As a depositary power for the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons—NPT—the United Kingdom has consistently worked to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to encourage other states to accede to and abide by the treaty.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the actions taken by Her Majesty's Government to support and strengthen each article, respectively, of the 1968 nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The Prime Minister: The information is not centrally recorded and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. In our role as a depositary power for the treaty, the United Kingdom has strongly supported the NPT since its inception, and has been consistently active to this end.

South Africa

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy in regard to South Africa on *(a)* the need for transitional arrangements for the Government during the negotiating process, *(b)* the continued detention of political prisoners, *(c)* the implementation of the national peace accord, *(d)* the introduction of regulations banning the carrying of weapons at political rallies and *(e)* the proposal to give the white electorate a veto through a referendum on any agreement reached at the convention for a democratic South Africa.

The Prime Minister: I welcome the negotiations which are taking place within the Convention for a Democratic South Africa-CODESA. I have discussed them with President de Klerk and Mr. Mandela in meetings this month. It is for the South African people to decide on constitutional issues and any transitional arrangements.

We have urged the release of all political prisoners throughout South Africa: more than 1,000 political prisoners were released last year.

I welcomed the national peace accord when it was signed last year. Since then I have urged all parties to work for its implementation.

I welcome all measures designed to reduce the risk of violence.

The South African Government have proposed a referendum to obtain the views of all South Africans. The procedure for this is a matter for discussion in CODESA.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration he has given to the National party proposals published on 5 September 1991 on constitutional change in South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I welcome the National party's intention to negotiate a democratic constitution which is non-racial and based on universal suffrage. These issues are being discussed in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa.

President de Klerk

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his meeting with President de Klerk on 1 February.

The Prime Minister: I met President de Klerk on 2 February. We discussed the constitutional talks in South Africa. The President expressed his determination to see them through to a new constitution. On township violence, President de Klerk said that national peace accord measures were in place and beginning to prove effective. The Goldstone commission was examining allegations against the South African defence force. The President explained the progress made in integration in sport, and said that unification of control of rugby should be concluded by late March. We agreed to keep up our dialogue.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Prime Minister who will represent Britain at the meeting to be held between the European Commission and the member Community states on a draft Council directive on dietary supplements.

The Prime Minister: The meeting to which the hon. Member refers will be attended by officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health. I should add that no Council directive on dietary supplements has yet been drafted: the meeting is to examine a Commission discussion paper.

Pay Review Bodies

Sir Anthony Meyer: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the latest reports of the pay review bodies.

The Prime Minister: In 1992 reports of the review bodies on the pay of the doctors and dentists, the professions allied to medicine, nursing staff, midwives and health visitors, the armed forces and school teachers have been published today. Copies are available in the Vote Office. The Government are grateful to the members of the review bodies for the time and care which they have put into the preparation of the reports.

The following table shows the increases recommended by the review bodies for each group, and their cost.

Review body	*Pay bill increase 1992-93*[1] *per cent.*	*Range of increases per cent.*	*Public expenditure cost £ million*
Doctors and dentists (DDRB)[2]	6·0	5·5–8·5	[3]314
Nurses and allied professions (NAPRB)[2]			
—nurses and midwives	5·8	5·6–6·0	[3]435
—professions allied to medicine (PAMs)	6·3	6·2–6·5	[3]48
Armed forces (AFRB)[4]	5·9	5·9–7·9	274
Schoolteachers (STRB)[5]	7·8	7·5	765

[1] Percentages by which the awards would increase the estimated 1992-93 pay bill.

[2] Great Britain. Northern Ireland health service pay normally follows Great Britain but is described separately.

[3] Includes cost of staff in NHS Trusts.

[4] United Kingdom.

[5] England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate pay regimes for school teachers.

The Government accept these recommendations and propose to pay them in full from 1 April 1992. The cost of implementing them will be met from within the public expenditure planning totals published in the autumn statement.

The Government recognise that the cost of the health service awards could not be met in full from present health service provision without adversely affecting services to patients. The Government will therefore provide an extra £149 million from the reserve for next year. The Government also accept that local education authorities would have difficulty in absorbing the full cost of the teachers' pay award, and have therefore decided to finance from the reserve an additional £60 million of grant to local authorities. The cost for the armed forces will be absorbed within the defence budget.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Wood (Fuel Use)

44. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what strategic plans there are to assist moves towards the diminution of the amount of wood used as a fuel in the third world and rain forest countries, and to address the consequences of such wood use on the top soil.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Many developing countries have national plans for the energy sector, which are drawn up and implemented with external assistance. These plans typically involve a range of fuels, including wood, which, when it comes from sustainably managed sources, can play a valuable role in meeting energy needs.

Pakistan

45. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current amount of aid given to Pakistan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In 1990, the last year for which full figures are available, Britain's gross bilateral aid amounted to £47·6 million. The ODA provided £34·6 million.

India

46. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received over the effectiveness of United Kingdom financial aid to India's economic reform programme.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Indian Prime Minister and Finance Minister thanked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State during his recent visit to India for British support of their economic reforms, and for the £30 million of additional aid provided this year.

Non-governmental Development Organisations

47. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has met representatives of non-governmental development organisations during the last month to discuss their role in aid matters.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the last four weeks my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has met voluntary agencies on five occasions. I have had two such meetings.

Overseas Aid

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in rank order the donor nations of the United Nations showing the proportion of gross national product donated to overseas aid for the most recent year available, and the cash figures in sterling.

Mrs. Chalker: The latest information is as follows:

Official development assistance by United Nations member countries in 1990 in oda/GNP percentage order

Country	*Amount £ million*	*Per cent. of GNP 1990*
Saudi Arabia	2,079	3·89
Norway	678	1·17
Netherlands	1,459	0·94
Denmark	659	0·93
Sweden	1,133	0·90
France	5,281	0·79
Finland	476	0·64
Libya	[2]72	[2]0·52
Belgium	501	0·45
Canada	1,391	0·44
Germany	3,558	0·42
Australia	538	0·34
Italy	1,911	0·32
Japan	5,106	0·31
Luxembourg	14	0·28
United Kingdom	1,485	0·27
Austria	222	0·25
Portugal	79	0·25
New Zealand	52	0·22
United States	6,399	0·21
Ireland	32	0·16
Spain	450	[1]0·16
Venezuela	23	0·09
Qatar	[2]2	[2]0·08
Greece	[1]21	[2]0·07
Nigeria	[2]8	[2]0·05
China	[1]101	[1]0·05
Algeria	[1,2]7	[2]0·02
Iceland	[2]1	[2]0·02
Kuwait	938	n/a
UAE	500	n/a
India	[1]62	n/a
USSR	1,126	n/a
Israel	[2]10	n/a
Yugoslavia	[2]3	n/a
Other Central and Eastern Europe	[1]84	n/a

[1] Estimate by OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Secretariat whole or in part.

[2] 1988 figures given, being the latest year for which data is available.

n/a—GNP figures not available.

Other non United Nations donors	*£ million*	*oda/GNP*
Switzerland	422	0·31
Korea (Rep.)	43	0·03
Taiwan	34	0·04

Source: DAC Chairman's Report 1990 and 1991 (OECD, Paris).

Developing Countries

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the total ODA budget, bilateral and multilateral, for 1991-92 has been committed for direct support for good government in developing countries; what is the level of funding; and in which countries Her Majesty's Government are supporting such projects.

Mrs. Chalker: We plan to spend around £30 million of bilateral aid[1] this year in direct support of "good government" activities. This is 3 per cent. of total bilateral aid. Countries in which we are funding such projects include:

Egypt
Ethiopia

Gambia
Ghana
Guinea
Kenya
Malawi
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Nigeria
Uganda
Zambia
Zimbabwe
Bangladesh
India
Malaysia
Maldives
Nepal
Pakistan
Philippines
Sri Lanka
Dominica
Grenada
Guyana
Jamaica
Montserrat
St. Kitts
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Turks and Caicos
Eastern Caribbean
Mexico
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
South Africa
Swaziland
Tanzania
St. Helena
Anguilla
Antigua
Barbados
Belize
British Virgin Islands
Fiji
Kiribati
Solomon Islands
Tonga
Tuvalu
Vanuatu

We also plan to provide in excess of £140 million—14 per cent. of total bilateral aid—this year for balance of payments support to countries implementing IMF-approved economic reform programmes, which also fall within "good government".

[1] The data required to assess our multilateral aid expenditure on good government projects this year are not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Audit Committees

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received since 1988, and from whom, opposing the need for a statutory requirement for companies to have audit committees.

Mr. Redwood: None. Those opposed to a statutory requirement for companies to have audit committees had no call to make representations since the Government have not made proposals to introduce such a requirement.

Company Directors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he proposes to bring forward legislation to increase the powers and resources of independent company directors.

Mr. Redwood: No. I would encourage companies to have high-calibre non-executive directors and to give all their directors adequate powers and resources. How this is done is best left to individual companies. All directors, in fulfilling their responsibilities, should exercise their judgment independently.

Company Voting Procedures

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will review the proxy system of voting exercised at company annual general meetings.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Departmental Computers

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how long each computerised system in his Department would take to return to full operation in the event of a disaster.

Mr. Leigh: The Department's IT security policy requires that, for each IT system, appropriate measures are adopted to maintain availability. Measures are determined by means of risk analysis and include disaster recovery plans. Such plans will take into account the time-critical nature of the system, the various types of disaster—say, from loss of stored data to loss of a building—and the costs and impact of loss of service. Such planning provides a mechanism for dealing with different types of loss of service in a cost-effective manner. System recovery times following a disaster will vary in accordance with the size of the system, the recovery requirements established and the type and magnitude of any disaster that might occur.

Executive Agencies

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will arrange to place in the Library the business plans of the executive agencies which come within his Department's responsibilities.

Mr. Leigh: I am arranging for copies of the current corporate plans to be placed in the Library for Accounts Branch—now Accounts Services Agency—and for the Patent Office executive agency, together with the summary corporate plan for Companies House executive agency.

In cases where commercial confidentiality, or the need to protect other sensitive information means it is not possible to make an agency's corporate plan public, information about its corporate strategy should be available from the annual report. In addition to the statutory reports required to be laid before Parliament, I am arranging for copies of the most recent annual reports to be placed in the Library for the following agencies:

Insolvency Service Executive Agency.
Laboratory of the Government Chemist Executive Agency.
National Engineering Laboratory Executive Agency.
National Physical Laboratory Executive Agency.
National Weights and Measures Laboratory Executive Agency.

Radiocommunications Executive Agency.
Warren Spring Laboratory Executive Agency.

EC (Aid Distribution)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will outline the differences between the proposals by the European Commission for the distribution of regional and other aids and the practice of the United Kingdom Government; and what proposals the Commission has for public authorities and other bodies to make direct application to Brussels for such aid or grants.

Mr. Leigh: The Commission has suggested that the allocation of Community structural funds should be completely separated from other central Government allocations in the United Kingdom public expenditure system.

The Government believe that expenditure financed by the funds should be approved by Parliament. The funds therefore feature in the supply estimates of relevant Departments.

As regards the possibility of public authorities and other bodies making direct application to Brussels for grants, the Commission has made no such proposals formally. Article 14(1) of Council regulation (EEC) 4253/88 requires applications to be submitted by the member state concerned or by any body it may designate to do so. As it is not expected that the increase in the appropriations for the Funds will lead to any increase in the United Kingdom's receipts from them, the Government believes that Article 9 has no practical impact on the United Kingdom.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will outline the nature of the changes agreed by the EC on the distribution of regional grants in 1988, and the impact these changes have for the established practices of the United Kingdom Government on the distribution of such grants.

Mr. Leigh: Article 9 of Council regulation (EEC) 4253/88 provides that

> "In establishing and implementing the Community support frameworks, the Commission and the Member States shall ensure that the increase in the appropriations for the Funds provided for in Article 12(2) of Regulation (EEC) No. 2052/88 has a genuine additional economic impact in the regions concerned and results in at least an equivalent increase in the total volume of official or similar (Community and national) structural aid in the Member State concerned, taking account of the macro-economic circumstances in which the funding takes place."

Article 12(2) of Council regulation (EEC) 2052/88 states, inter alia, that

> "Commitment appropriations for the Structural Funds shall be doubled in real terms in 1993 by comparison with 1987."

As it is not expected that the increase in the appropriations for the funds will lead to any increase in the United Kingdom's receipts from them, the Government believe that article 9 has no practical impact on the United Kingdom.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the sums allocated by the EC for regional aid to the United Kingdom is spent only for that purpose.

Mr. Leigh: Yes.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much aid from the EC is being delayed on account of the procedural issues raised by the EC Commission; and if Her Majesty's Government will delay comparable amounts in their payments to the EC.

Mr. Leigh: *(a)* Approximately £135 million; *(b)* No.

Foreign Telecommunications Companies

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from foreign telecommunications companies that wish to commence business in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: The Government's pro-competitive telecommunications policy has already led to major overseas investment in the United Kingdom, most notably with a projected £5 billion commitment by cable television companies. Of the 24 applications for licences to run telecommunications systems since the duopoly review, 12 are from foreign companies or companies with a significant foreign shareholding. A further 30 firms, both British and foreign owned, have expressed an interest in applying for a licence. I welcome the investment and jobs that will be created by foreign companies and the wide range of innovative services they plan to offer. This further confirms that the United Kingdom is the preferred location in Europe for inward investment in telecommunications.

Home Income Investment

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the Financial Intermediaries, Managers and Brokers Regulatory Organisation and other regulatory bodies on the subject of home income investment bond schemes and related debt incurred by older people.

Mr. Redwood: I have encouraged the Securities and Investments Board to take the lead in ensuring that everything possible is done to help clients who were sold unsuitable schemes, and to prevent such difficulties in the future.

Home Income Investment Bonds

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the losses incurred by pensioners taking out home income investment bond schemes.

Mr. Redwood: I have received a number of representations on this subject, which I have referred to the appropriate regulatory bodies.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress towards agreement on the proposed European directive on data protection and telecommunications.

Mr. Redwood: Member states have given initial views on the directive in a working group of the Council, though detailed discussions have to date been delayed pending consideration of the draft general directive on data protection. The European Parliament's opinion on the directive is expected shortly.

Eureka

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to implement the agreements on Eureka worked out at Helsinki in 1991.

Mr. Leigh: The United Kingdom is actively involved in the Eureka high-level group, which is responsible for the implementation of the agreements worked out at The Hague in 1991. Current major issues under discussion are the new medium-term plan, strategic projects, interaction between EC research and development and Eureka, and new members. My noble Friend the Under Secretary of State for Industry and Technology and other European Ministers will review the progress made at the Finnish ministerial conference, which will be held in Tampere, Finland in May 1992.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to involve small firms in the Eureka project.

Mr. Leigh: Participation in Eureka projects is a matter for individual companies, but the DTI offers preferential rates of funding to small firms and is constantly improving the flow of information to enable them to consider the Eureka option.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations he is having with the CBI on framework programmes for Eureka.

Mr. Leigh: My Department maintains good contacts with the CBI on European R and D issues. Over recent months, senior departmental officials have been involved in discussions with the CBI on the EC's framework programme for R and D—for example at the round-table meeting organised by the CBI in September of last year.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what help he is giving to British Industry by providing case studies on Eureka.

Mr. Leigh: Twelve case studies have just been published to illustrate the benefits of Eureka collaboration to potential project participants in the United Kingdom. The case studies will be primarily targeted at United Kingdom industry to enable them to consider the Eureka mechanism in developing their own European and world market strategies.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he is providing to British firms about potential partners across Europe for Eureka projects.

Mr. Leigh: The main promotional tool for Eureka in the United Kingdom is the Eureka handbook which is produced by the DTI's Eureka unit. The handbook contains details of the Eureka database in Brussels, which can be used as a contact mechanism for potential partners, and of DTI feasibility studies which can be used for partner search activities.

Also, through the use of consultancies, the DTI provides information to United Kingdom industry on Eureka in general as well as details of European partnering and marriage broking events in Europe aimed at generating Eureka projects.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what encouragement he is giving to British industry to back large strategic projects in relation to Eureka.

Mr. Leigh: In some cases, the DTI actively encourages United Kingdom industry to participate in large strategic projects by holding workshops, and launching targeted consultancy activities and mailshots. More generally, the DTI's Eureka unit is constantly improving the flow of information to United Kingdom firms to enable them to consider the possible role of the Eureka mechanism in developing their own European and world market strategies.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what help he is giving to British industry in clarifying the start-up procedures for the Eureka project.

Mr. Leigh: The Eureka unit has produced a handbook, which details how Eureka works and summarises the process of seeking Eureka status and Government support for a project. Information on Eureka and copies of the handbook are available from the Eureka inquiry point.

Staff in the Eureka unit regularly give presentations to industry covering the start-up processes in detail, while project officers from DTI line divisions give advice to companies on the specifics of Government grants when sought.

Line divisions also run consultancies in their own areas of policy responsibility. This activity disseminates information on Eureka to companies having no prior knowledge of the Eureka initiative, in order to help them participate in new Eureka projects.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration he is giving to the conditions for the withdrawal of the Eureka grant if a project does not perform well over a period of years.

Mr. Leigh: The assistance the Department gives to Eureka projects is governed by standard conditions.

While the Department, in supporting projects, recognises the inherent financial and technical risks involved in pan-European collaboration, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may, under the terms of the Department's offer letter, terminate payment of grant, and, if appropriate, reclaim grant already paid, if certain specified conditions are not met.

Circumstances that might trigger withdrawal of grant include:

(i) that the future of the project is in jeopardy;
(ii) that in the opinion of the Secretary of State progress towards completion of the project is unsatisfactory.

Instances of withdrawal of Eureka grant are rare.

The matter of funding for United Kingdom firms participating in Eureka projects is quite distinct from the issue of Eureka status for projects. Introducing a mechanism for withdrawal of such status from projects which do not perform as expected, was one recommendation of the international Eureka assessment panel which reported last year; it is being pursued in the high-level group of representatives from Eureka countries.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to help management resources in small companies bidding to participate in European and Eureka projects.

Mr. Leigh: There are no immediate plans to give additional help to small companies in this way.

The DTI's enterprise initiative currently offers consultancy advice to small companies on making better use of technology, and advice on participation in Eureka projects is always readily available from the Eureka unit, DTI line divisions and regional offices.

Financially, small and medium-sized companies may be eligible for 50 per cent. funding for a pre-Eureka feasibility study. In recognition of the higher technical and commercial risks associated with European collaboration, the United Kingdom Government can offer a higher overall grant rate to small and medium-sized enterprises for participation in a Eureka project.

Intermediate Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the percentage difference in the volume of imports of intermediate goods recorded in December 1991, compared to December 1985; and what assessment he has made of the factors which led to this change.

Mr. Redwood: The volume of imports of intermediate goods increased by 63 per cent. between the fourth quarters of 1985 and 1991. The change is due to decisions by United Kingdom industry to import goods at the later stage of manufacture, in order to obtain the best value for money and thereby maintain competitiveness.

Interest-free Credit

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what concerns have been expressed to his Department in relation to the advertising of interest-free credit; how many complaints about the advertising of interest-free credit have been received by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* The National Consumer Council and the Consumers Association are concerned that advertisements for interest-free credit should include information about repayments. In the last year there have been no complaints about such advertisements. I shall give careful consideration to the views on interest-free credit which have been expressed in reply to the consultation document "Revised Proposals on Credit Marketing".

Photocopiers and Fax Machines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in improving the rights of lessees of photocopiers and fax machines by amending the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* A number of possible amendments to the Consumer Credit Act are being examined. However, no decisions have been taken. If it should be decided to amend the Act, implementation of that decision would have to await parliamentary time for primary legislation.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to reply to the letter sent to him on 10 January 1991 by the information secretary of the National Federation of Retail Newsagents concerning alleged misrepresentation by salesmen of fax machines and photocopiers.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* A reply was sent on 4 February.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Earnings Disregards

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the additional annual cost to the Exchequer of paying benefits while applying an earnings disregard for (i) child care costs, (ii) fares to work and (iii) other reasonable expenses connected with work.

Mr. Jack: In the absence of specific assumptions about the size of such disregards, information is not available to make a reliable estimate of the costs involved. However, the estimated additional annual cost of increasing earnings disregards by £1 per week for all claimants in income support, community charge benefit, housing benefit and family credit is around £25 million in total at 1991-92 prices and benefit levels.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1986-88 family expenditure surveys and the 1990 annual statistical inquiry.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether pensioner couples aged 60 to 74 years who are not entitled to income support since the April 1991 pension uprating will be entitled to cold weather payments for the current winter.

Mr. Scott: No. To qualify for a cold weather payment a pensioner must be getting income support with the pensioner premium.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, following the social security commissioners' decision CA/380/90, what are his plans to identify children who were under the age of two before April 1990 and refused attendance allowance under the pre-1990 law.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so. Children who were refused attendance allowance on age grounds cannot benefit from the commissioners' decision. This is because legislation prevents the payment of arrears where claims have been adjudicated upon and a review is then sought following a reinterpretation of the law.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations have been received to date concerning payment of attendance allowance for a child under two in the period before April 1990.

Mr. Scott: We have received a number of representations on individual cases, to which we are replying.

Maternity Payments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are claiming maternity payment as a proportion of the people who are eligible for this payment.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The data information systems in use in the Department are detailed in the Information Technology Services Agency's annual business plan 1991-92 and reported on in the agency's annual report 1990-91 both of which have been placed in the Library. All the systems are registered under, and fully comply with, the Data Protection Act which compels the listing of all those to whom data might be provided.

Departmental Annual Report

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date he expects the Department's annual report to be available to hon. Members in the Vote Office.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on 30 January at columns *634-35.*

Home Visits

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give *(a)* the total number of home visits to claimants, *(b)* the total mileage covered in carrying out those visits and *(c)* the total travel expenses paid out for home visits by staff at the Maryhill road, Atlas road and Pitt street, Glasgow Department of Social Security offices, respectively, in each year from 1979 to 1991; and also give the total number of (i) staff employed, (ii) benefit claimants interviewed and (iii) benefit claimants serviced at those offices in those years.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Benefit Payments (Delays)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement explaining in full the action which was taken by *(a)* his private office and *(b)* his Department following the inquiry made in December on behalf of the hon. Member for Macclesfield in connection with the delay in the payment of benefits to Mr. Manning of 3 Renfrew close, Macclesfield.

Mr. Scott: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement explaining the assistance to which Mr. Manning of 3 Renfrew close, Macclesfield is entitled in connection with his increased responsibilities and commitments in providing a home for his two nephews; and if he will set out the reasons why no payments have yet been made in this respect to Mr. Manning.

Mr. Scott: The administration of benefit payments is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend shortly and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Orphans

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the assistance which is available from his Department to assist young orphans with the cost of the provision of the funerals of their parents.

Mr. Scott: An adult who receives income support, family credit, housing benefit or community charge benefit, and who is responsible for arranging a funeral, will be entitled to a funeral payment from the social fund. A young orphan would not be entitled in his own right because he could not receive any of the qualifying benefits.

Social Fund

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the budget loan awarded and *(b)* the crisis loan awarded under the social fund for the year 1990-91 and the first six months of 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: Information on budget and crisis loan awards for 1990-91 and the first six months of 1991-92 is in the Library.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants applied for grants or loans under the social fund during the financial year 1990-91 and the first six months of 1991-92 in each of the benefit offices in North Tees and South Tees area;

(2) how many claimants were refused grants or loans under the social fund during the financial year 1990-91 and the first six months of 1991-92 in each of the benefit offices in North Tees and South Tees; and for what reason;

(3) under the social fund, what was the average size of the grant awarded for the year 1990-91 and the first six months of 1991-92 in each of the benefit offices in North Tees and South Tees area.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Teesside Benefit Areas

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the current targets for the North Tees and South Tees benefit areas are for meeting *(a)* delivery and *(b)* accuracy for benefits administered.

Miss Widdecombe: The setting of targets for district offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Severe Hardship Allowance

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many severe hardship allowance payments were made to young people for the year 1990-91 *(a)* in the North and *(b)* in South Tees benefit area; and how many have been made in the first six months of 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the figures *(a)* by region and *(b)* nationally for each year from 1987 onwards of the number of people applying for (i) mobility allowances and (ii) attendance allowances; and the actual numbers granted in each case.

Mr. Scott *[pursuant to his reply, 27 January 1992, c. 467-68]:* I regret that the figure for 1991 was incorrect. The correct information is as follows:

Regional figures are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Available national figures are given in the table:

	AA initial and subsequent claims[1] (rounded thousands)		*MobA initial and subsequent claims[1] (rounded thousands)*	
Year	*Number received*	*Awards*	*Number received*	*Awards*
1987	320	209	182	92
1988	362	208	200	92
1989	365	229	200	93
1990	409	274	198	130
1991	539	348	231	109

[1] Claims received in any year are not necessarily processed in that same year. Figures for renewals are not included.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss the resolution of the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly calling on Indonesia to withdraw from East Timor with the Indonesian Foreign Minister at his meeting in London on 5 February.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs made clear to the Indonesian Foreign Minister that we continue to support the United Nations Secretary-General in his efforts to promote contacts between Indonesia and Portugal to reach a settlement satisfactory to both sides, as called for in a United Nations General Assembly resolution of 1982.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In common with many other Departments, the business of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is increasingly conducted with the use of data information systems. It would not be possible to document them fully other than at a disproportionate cost. Systems are registered under the terms of the Data Protection Act, under which the FCO has eight registrations, at present encompassing 1,194 applications. None of these is linked to the police national computer, or to other external systems.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the case of Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We deplore the continuing failure of the Burmese authorities to respond to our own and other international calls for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, including the United Nations General Assembly resolution on human rights in Burma which we co-sponsored and which drew attention to her plight. With our EC partners we have called on the Burmese authorities to allow Aung San Suu Kyi access to her family and to permit her to receive proper medical attention. We have urged other countries to make similar approaches to the regime in Burma.

Albanians, Kosovo

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends to monitor how recognition of Slovenia and Croatia may alter the prospects for ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We will continue to monitor closely the situation in Yugoslavia and the impact which recognition of Slovenia and Croatia has had there.

Arms Sales (Definition)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his proposed definition of arms for the purposes of the establishment of an arms sales register as required by United Nations resolution will cover *(a)* the sales of designs, technology and project management expertise, *(b)* military end-users of dual-use machine tools, and electronic equipment, *(c)* radar, communications and energy option equipment and *(d)* bunkers, testing facilities and target-hardening equipment.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on 12 December 1991, at column *499*.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries over which Her Majesty's Government have concern arising from the buildup of fissile nuclear materials capable of being diverted to military use in nuclear warheads.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Any country failing to accede to the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons or to other similar nuclear non-proliferation agreements involving the safeguarding of all their fissile nuclear materials must expect to be viewed with some concern.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community's Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel-Jones *[pursuant to his answer, 5 February 1992, c. 199]:* The Foreign Affairs Council met on 3 February and a statement on its outcome was made on 7 February.

The Economic and Financial Council will meet on 10 February. Ministers will consider multilateral surveillance of the economies of member states, including the Irish convergence programme, and also the formal adoption of the Commission's annual economic report. The Council will also consider aid to central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Council may also consider the revision to the financial perspective for 1992, the investment services directive and the legislative programme relating to economic and monetary union arising from the treaty on European union. Ministers may also formally adopt the legal text of the draft directive on the commercial movement of excise goods in the single market which they agreed at the Economic and Finance Council on 16 December 1991. It is also expected that Ministers will formally adopt a new regulation for enhanced administrative cooperation between member states. This will provide for the automatic exchange of information between EC tax authorities.

The Agriculture Council will meet on 10 and 11 February. Ministers will discuss reform on the common agricultural policy, agricultural aspects of the GATT Uruguay round, public health problems affecting the killing of wild game and the marketing of wild game meat.

The internal market council will meet on 25 February. Ministers may consider the final adoption of the public procurement directive for remedies in the utilities sectors, and the adoption of common positions on the third non-life insurance directive. Consolidation directives on tractors and on units of measurement, and a directive on veterinary homeopathic medicines will also be discussed by Ministers. There may also be further ministerial discussions on frontier controls, and draft legislation on data protection, precursor chemicals, food colourings and food irradiation.

TRANSPORT

Light Dues

12. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to abolish the system of light dues.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government have no plans to abolish the system of light dues.

British Rail

13. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects to publish proposals for the privatisation of British Rail.

19. **Sir Robert McCrindle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects to publish his White Paper on the privatisation of British Rail.

Mr. Rifkind: We are making very good progress in developing our proposals to expand the use of the railways through the ending of the rail monopoly and involving the private sector in providing rail services.

22. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to improve the commercial responsiveness of British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: Privatisation will improve the commercial responsiveness of British Rail. Meanwhile, the passengers charter, BR's response to the citizens charter, which will be published later this month, will signal a better deal for rail users.

Greenford-Paddington Line

14. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss investment in a direct line from Greenford to Paddington; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend and I meet the chairman of British Rail regularly to discuss current issues. Substantial investment in the Greenford to Paddington corridor is planned over the next few years as part of the total modernisation of Network SouthEast's Thames line.

Network SouthEast

15. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss the running of Network SouthEast; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend and I meet the chairman of British Rail regularly to discuss current issues.

Lorries (Lateral Spray)

16. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made by his Department on identifying the cause of lateral spray from large lorries and other heavy vehicles during wet conditions on motorways; and what means he has identified to reduce such spray.

Mr. Chope: Research at the Transport and Road Research Laboratory into quantifying the danger caused by loss of vision as a result of spray is continuing. A new EC directive at a slightly higher standard than, and operating as an alternative to, the existing national regulations will come into force from April 1992. I hope that a revised British standard, reflecting the improvements in the directive, will be available by the middle of this year so it can then be incorporated in national regulations.

Blight Notice Regulations

17. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the scope of the blight notice regulations.

Mr. Chope: I announced on 17 January the rules which will govern the exercise of the additional discretionary powers conferred by section 62 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

A11

18. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the dualling of the A11 between Newmarket and Four Wentways to be completed.

Mr. Chope: Tenders for the work were received on 4 February. Assessment, award of contract and mobilisation of the successful contractor normally take about two months. The period for completion in the tender documents is two years, which means the road would be dualled by spring 1993.

Citizens Charter

20. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what redress under the citizens charter he proposes to make available to passengers on public transport.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail and London Underground are to publish their customer charters shortly. Both charters will introduce new systems of redress.

A5

21. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has plans to upgrade the A5 from Hinckley—M69/A5 junction—to Nuneaton—A47/A5.

Mr. Chope: No schemes are currently included in the roads programme to upgrade this section of the A5.

A scheme identification study has been carried out to examine the length of the A5 between Old Sleaford, Bucks and the M42, to identify viable options for improving this route. The study report is now being evaluated. Any suitable schemes arising from this will be considered for inclusion in the roads programme when it is next reviewed.

Fenchurch Street Line

23. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what priority is now being given to improving rail services on the Fenchurch Street line.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail is treating plans for modernisation of the Fenchurch Street line as a matter of high priority. It will shortly let a contract for the £50 resignalling programme which should be completed during 1995. British Rail sees this as the key to improving services. British Rail's rolling stock proposals are currently under discussion with the Department.

Motorist Courtesy Campaign

24. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce a motorist courtesy campaign, including television and cinema advertising, to enforce respect for the rights of pedestrians, cyclists and other road users.

Mr. Chope: As part of our wider policy initiatives to improve the safety of vulnerable road users we are currently running a series of campaigns to make motorists more aware of their responsibility for the safety of others, particularly children. These campaigns focus on the need to slow down in residential areas, where inappropriate speed is a major contributory cause of accidents.

Midland Line

25. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent meetings he has had with local authorities to discuss electrification of the midland line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I met representatives of the midland main line consortium of local authorities on 4 November. I understand that the consortium has commissioned consultants to examine the case for electrification of the line. Their final report is awaited. It would be for British Rail to bring forward an investment submission if it believed that the project deserves priority within the resources available to it.

Docklands Light Railway

26. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date he expects the Beckton extension of the docklands light railway to be opened for passenger traffic.

Mr. Freeman: Good progress has been made so far on the construction of the Beckton extension. However, the exact date of the opening of the passenger service will be dependent upon the satisfactory commissioning and clear demonstration of reliability of the new signalling system. An announcement will be made by the DLR as soon as a firm date is known.

Alternative Rail Services

27. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with possible providers of alternative rail services.

Mr. Freeman: A number of private companies have expressed interest in providing rail services, including Virgin, Stagecoach, Badgerline, National Power, Hunslet Barclay and others. This is very encouraging evidence of the opportunities which exist for private sector participation in the passenger and freight railway.

Roads (North-East England)

28. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much the Government have spent on road construction and maintenance in the north-east of England since 1979; how much the Government plan to spend in 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Since 1979 the Government have spent some £412 million in cash terms on road construction and maintenance of trunk roads and the motorways in the north-east of England.

Additionally over the last six years the Department has provided transport supplementary grant for local authority road schemes amounting to some £73 million.

The total provision for 1992-93 has not yet been decided.

London Underground (Disabled People)

29. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what survey has been made of the access available for disabled people to travel on London underground; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The unit for disabled passengers at London Transport works closely with London Underground Ltd.—LUL—and representatives of people with disabilities on improvements in access to the underground system. A guide is produced by the unit which gives information on access at all stations.

LUL has also recently commissioned a report on safety aspects of wheelchair users travelling in deep sections of the system, and that report is currently under discussion with the railway inspectorate.

Rail Services (Swansea)

30. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to provide further funding for rail services to and from Swansea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: It is for British Rail to determine future investment priorities within the funds available. Any investment in the south Wales line would have to be considered in the light of investment needs elsewhere on the network, as well as the merits of the actual case.

Agricultural Vehicles

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to rationalise the handling of European type approval applications for agricultural vehicles.

Mr. Chope: In order to reduce the burden on manufacturers and to improve the efficiency of type approval procedures, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has approved the transfer of responsibility for agricultural vehicle type approval matters from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Department of Transport. Subject to parliamentary approval, the relevant regulations will be amended to bring this into effect from 10 February 1992.

River Safety Inquiry

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that adequate resources for legal advice and assistance are available to those seeking to make representations or give evidence to the inquiry set up into river safety.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend has asked Mr. John Hayes, secretary general of the Law Society, to carry out an independent investigation into river safety. Mr. Hayes has already asked for written representations, through advertisements in the press and letters to those with a known interest. I understand that he also intends inviting some individuals to discuss their evidence with him. These discussions will be totally non-adversarial and held in private. In the circumstances I do not think that those who choose to give evidence should have any need of legal advice and I do not propose to use public funds to meet any costs they might incur.

Coastguard

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the effects of the proposed changes in coastguard service provision on the ability of auxiliary staff to provide an effective service.

Mr. McLoughlin: The sector review provided inter alia an in-depth assessment of the ability of the auxiliary coastguard service to provide an effective service. Proposals put forward as a result aim further to improve this ability, including the establishment of 68 additional auxiliary coastguard companies around the coast at locations where there previously were none; by doubling numbers of pagers and portable radios; by improving remuneration, equipment, and training of auxiliaries; and by way of an extensive station building and upgrading programme to provide the coastguard with modern bases from which to operate.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide a breakdown by United Kingdom county and region of the finance being allocated for the implementation of the proposed changes in coastguard provision; and how much of this will be offset by planned disposals.

Mr. McLoughlin: The internal structure of the coastguard service is not organised along United Kingdom county/regional boundaries. The financial allocation for the whole of the United Kingdom for the implementation period of the sector review is in the region of £1,430,000. I would refer the hon. Member to an earlier reply I gave him concerning the disposal of assets, where I stated that no significant income is expected, and that annual running cost savings of over £50,000 will be achieved once the programme of disposals is complete.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from members of the public expressing dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the coastguard service in responding quickly to reported incidents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Secretary of State for Transport has received no representations from members of the public expressing dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the coastguard service in responding quickly to reported incidents in the past year. Her Majesty's coastguard has received expressions of dissatisfaction over the handling of four incidents—out of over 7,200—in the past year.

Her Majesty's coastguard constantly seeks to improve availability, readiness and resources in order to provide the best possible search-and-rescue service in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, columns *216-17*, if he will specify the meetings, including dates, he has had with the representatives of coastguard auxiliary staff on the proposed changes to coastguard service provision.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Secretary of State for Transport has not had any meetings with representatives of the auxiliary coastguard concerning proposed changes resulting from the sector review. The coastguard management structure is in place to fulfil the Secretary of State's remit to provide a search-and-rescue organisation within the United Kingdom and auxiliary coastguards have formal access to this management to communicate their views, opinions and concerns.

The hon. Member will be aware that all auxiliary coastguard companies had ample opportunity to communicate their views and opinions on the sector review proposals to district and regional management before final regional implementation plans were submitted to coastguard headquarters.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from chief coastguards on the proposed changes in coastguard service provision; how many expressed *(a)* approval and *(b)* disapproval with the proposed changes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Secretary of State has received no representations from regional controllers on the sector review. Regional controllers have had, apart from frequent written consultations and coastal visits by the chief coastguard, six meetings between January 1989 and May 1991 with the chief coastguard to discuss and formulate recommendations, and to put forward their local implementation plans. All expressed approval of the proposed changes.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he received from representatives of the auxiliary staff of the coastguard service on the review of the service; and how many indicated *(a)* approval and *(b)* disapproval.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Secretary of State has received no direct representation from representatives of the auxiliary staff of the coastguard service on the review of the service. Auxiliary coastguards were given ample opportunity to express their views and opinions concerning the sector review through local line management during the consultative period in 1991 before final regional implementation plans were submitted to coastguard headquarters.

The vast majority of auxiliary coastguards and regular officers are in favour of the review and its proposals. There are, exceptionally, a few localised areas where disapproval has been expressed.

A6M/A627 Junction, Stockport

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish details of the junction proposed for the A6M/A627 junction at Offerton road, Stockport, mentioned in his letter of 27 January to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove.

Mr. Chope: The junction proposals were published in November as part of the supplementary line and side roads orders.

Catalytic Converters

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has of the effects of the fitting of catalytic converters to vehicles in terms of noxious emissions, other emissions and fuel consumption.

Mr. Chope: On the basis of road tests carried out by the Government's Warren Spring laboratory, a typical vehicle equipped with a catalyst in good condition will reduce its emissions of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and oxides of nitrogen by approximately 90 per cent. in each case. On the other hand, fuel consumption will increase by 3 to 9 per cent., and there will be an increase of 9 to 23 per cent. in carbon dioxide emissions.

Smoke Hoods

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will obtain confirmation from the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority that where smoke hood manufacturers can demonstrate that their smoke hoods meet the requirement of the internationally agreed EUROCAE standard for passenger protective breathing equipment they will be deemed to have satisfied the Civil Aviation Authority's requirement that their smoke hoods do not hinder escape.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am advised by the Civil Aviation Authority that the best strategies to protect passengers in an aircraft fire are rapid evacuation and prevention of the spread of fire. The CAA believes that smokehoods, whether to the EUROCAE standard or otherwise, are likely to give rise to an unacceptable delay in evacuation.

London Underground (Policing)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the manning levels of British Transport police on the Central line; and what arrangements there are for compensating shopkeepers for criminal damage to shops on London Transport premises.

Mr. Freeman: More than 160 officers are stationed at British Transport police stations in the geographical area covered by the Central line. The terms of leases between LT and its tenants are a commercial matter for the parties involved, but I understand that LT's normal practice is to advise shopkeepers to take out insurance against criminal damage.

Bypasses and Motorways

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* bypasses and *(b)* motorways have been constructed by his Department since 1972; and if he will list for each of those bypasses and motorways the estimated traffic flows (i) at the time of design, (ii) on completion, (iii) after the first year of operation and (iv) at present.

Mr. Chope: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Department records traffic forecasts and actual traffic one year after opening for trunk road schemes for which orders have been published since 1981.

Traffic Accidents (Leicestershire)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of traffic accidents *(a)* in total and *(b)* resulting in deaths, for each year since 1980 (i) in Leicestershire and (ii) on the distributor road network in Leicester.

Mr. Chope: The number of injury accidents, and the number of these which resulted in deaths, in Leicestershire and the A563 Leicester ring road, from 1980 to 1990, are given in the table.

Injury accidents in Leicestershire and on the A563 Leicester ring road: By severity: 1980-1990

Year	*Leicestershire* *Fatal accidents*	*Leicestershire* *All injury accidents*	*A563* *Fatal accidents*	*A563* *All injury accidents*
1980	102	3,708	0	0
1981	100	3,624	0	0
1982	95	3,634	0	0
1983	98	3,658	0	0
1984	80	3,847	0	0
1985	91	3,748	0	5
1986	93	3,334	1	67
1987	87	3,651	1	56
1988	85	3,706	1	64
1989	90	3,690	4	90
1990	93	3,782	2	103

The A563 has been opened in several stages since 1983. The upward trend in accidents is related to increases in road length and the amount of traffic using it.

Toll Bridges

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the figures for *(a)* annual income and cost and *(b)* capital debt outstanding, for toll bridges in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is as follows.

The 1990-91 figures for the main toll bridges in England, for which accounts have been published, are as follows:

	Humber *£ million*	*Itchen* *£ million*	*Severn* *£ million*	*Tamar* *£ million*
1. Income (from toll)	10·7	2·0	20·8	2·7
2. Cost:				
Operating expenses	1·7	0·6	8·6	2·3
Debt and other charges	43·4	1·0	19·0	0·0
Total expenditure	45·1	1·6	27·6	2·3
Outstanding debt at 31 March 1991	404·7	3·6	148·9	—

Notes:

1. Annual income from toll (excludes income from other sources).
2. Outstanding debt comprises original capital cost and accumulated debt charges.

English Channel

Mr. Aitken: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the action his Department proposes to take as a result of the recent collision in the English channel off Ramsgate between the tanker Darya Kamal and the F3 Lanby buoy.

Mr. McLoughlin: The marine accident investigation branch—MAIB—obtained a written report from the master pertaining to the incident. The report was received on 30 January. After discussion with Trinity House, the MAIB decided that no further action needed to be taken.

Mr. Aitken: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department proposes to take in the light of recent collisions in the English channel to ensure that proper bridge watch keeping and manning levels exist on all ships using the English channel separation lanes inside or outside British territorial waters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The English channel and the Dover strait are an international waterway and rights of innocent passage exist so that the United Kingdom has no powers to board these ships while in transit. Ship movements are continuously monitored to verify compliance with traffic separation schemes. Apparent contraventions of the collision regulations are followed up with a view to prosecution by the United Kingdom or flag state as appropriate. Manning levels are checked during port state control inspections and the inspectors are empowered to detain any vessel where the manning is deficient.

Government Grants

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what Government grants were awarded for *(a)* ferry services and *(b)* bridge projects in England listed by region for each of the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Grants amounting to £1·325 million have been made to the Merseyside passenger transport authority in respect of the Woodside ferry terminal; the last payment was in February 1990.

Many local authority road schemes which have been assisted by transport supplementary grant include overpasses underpasses, and bridges over railways, rivers, streams, canals, or other roads. Records are not kept as to which schemes include bridges or as to the proportion of scheme costs representing bridges.

No grants have been made by my Department since 1986-87 towards the provision or improvement of tolled road bridges.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Asthma

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice is given to nursery, infant, primary and secondary schools concerning asthma sufferers and the proximity of schools and school playgrounds to major roads.

Mr. Fallon: Medical paediatric advice is available to schools and to LEAs from the district health authorities' community child health service. Individual children with asthma may be seen with their parents when advice may be given to the child and family, the teacher and the school with regard to management in a particular case.

The child's general medical practitioner who has responsibility for his or her medical care, or the hospital paediatrician in more severe cases, may also give advice not only to the child and family but to the teacher and school.

The proximity of a school and the school playground to major roads would be for local consideration by the school and the school doctor according to the state of health and asthma of an individual child or group of children.

Higher Education (Quality Audits)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements he proposes to replace the quality audit and quality assurance work in higher education currently undertaken by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals' academic audit unit and the Council for National Academic Awards.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics and the Standing Conference of Principals have submitted proposals to establish a new quality and access organisation. This would be responsible for monitoring institutions' quality control and validation arrangements, building on the work of the academic audit unit and the Council for National Academic Awards. It would also have a role in the promotion and dissemination of best practice, and would take on and develop the CNAA's functions in the areas of credit accumulation and transfer schemes and the recognition of access courses. Audit and other reports would be published. The steering council of the organisation would have industrial and professional, as well as academic, members. These proposals are in line with those in Cm 1541 and we have welcomed them in principle. I am expecting later this month a further report describing in greater detail how it is proposed that the new organisation would operate in practice.

Primary Education

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will make available in the Vote Office copies of the report on primary education by Professor Alexander, Mr. Rose and Mr. Woodhead;

(2) when copies of the report on primary education are to be sent to schools and colleges; how many copies are to be printed; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the interval between the publication date of the report and its likely receipt by schools.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I published the typescript of the report "Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools" as soon as I received it, and placed copies in the Library on that day, 22 January. It took until 5 February to prepare and produce the initial run of 145,000 printed copies. The extensive mailing of six copies to each primary school and further copies to local authorities, teacher educators and other interested bodies should be completed by 13 February. I have today placed copies of the printed report in the Vote Office.

Assisted Places

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children attend city technology colleges, grant-maintained schools and grammar schools and use the assisted-places scheme.

Mr. Eggar: The numbers of pupils attending those schools in England in January 1991 are shown in the table. In the same academic year 26,740 pupils in independent schools received support under the assisted places scheme.

	Number of pupils
City technology colleges	3,429
Grant-maintained schools[1]	36,445
LEA-maintained grammar schools	91,116

[1] Includes grant-maintained grammar schools.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the pupil-teacher ratio in Lancashire in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* to latest date in (i) secondary and (ii) primary schools.

Mr. Fallon: The pupil-teacher ratios requested are shown in the table.

Pupil-teacher ratios in Lancashire local education authority 1979 to 1991[1]

January	*Maintained primary schools*	*Maintained secondary schools*
1979	24·7	16·5
1980	24·2	16·4
1981	24·2	16·4
1982	24·4	16·7
1983	23·8	16·6
1984	23·2	16·4
1985	23·7	16·6
1986	23·7	16·4
1987	23·6	15·9
1988	23·3	15·6
1989	23·5	15·4
1990	23·3	15·6
1991	23·1	15·7

[1] The pupil-teacher ratios of qualified teachers within schools.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many local education authorities submitted results for the pupils with special educational needs with their returns of assessment tests for seven-year-old readers; and whether these were used in the compilation of the tables published on 19 December 1991.

Mr. Eggar: Returns from special schools were not included in the results published on 19 December. However, many LEAs included the results of pupils with special educational needs on roll in mainstream schools in their returns. It is not, however, possible to identify these pupils and hence the LEAs concerned.

Seven-year-olds

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) pursuant to his answer of 16 January to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr.

Spearing), *Official Report*, columns *580-82*, if he will list the reasons why some of the returns of assessment tests for seven-year-old readers submitted by local education authorities were not usable;

(2) if he will state for each local education authority the percentage of their assessment tests for seven-year-old readers which they submitted to his Department.

Mr. Eggar: Certain returns could not be used because they were incomplete or wrongly completed. Those returns were referred back to the LEA concerned. Any corrected results which were returned in time for publication and were usable, were included in the report published on 19 December. The table gives the percentage of returns of the test results for seven-year-olds received for each local education authority. Both usable and unusable returns are included.

Proportion of returns from maintained schools with 7 year olds processed for the purposes of publication of 19 December Report

LEA	*Percentage returns received*
Camden	97
Greenwich	98
Hackney	100
Hammersmith	100
Islington	88
Kensington and Chelsea	100
Lewisham	94
Southwark	91
Wandsworth	92
Westminster	100
Barking	100
Barnet	97
Bexley	100
Brent	100
Bromley	100
Croydon	100
Ealing	92
Enfield	100
Haringey	100
Harrow	94
Havering	100
Hillingdon	100
Hounslow	93
Kingston upon Thames	100
Merton	100
Newham	93
Redbridge	100
Richmond upon Thames	91
Sutton	100
Waltham Forest	100
Birmingham	78
Coventry	100
Dudley	100
Sandwell	95
Solihull	98
Walsall	99
Wolverhampton	97
Knowsley	98
Liverpool	93
St. Helens	98
Sefton	97
Wirral	99
Bolton	87
Bury	100
Manchester	97
Oldham	100
Rochdale	95
Salford	95
Stockport	100
Tameside	99
Trafford	98
Wigan	97
Barnsley	97
Doncaster	100
Rotherham	100
Sheffield	89
Bradford	98
Calderdale	100
Kirklees	99
Leeds	96
Wakefield	99
Gateshead	97
Newcastle upon Tyne	99
North Tyneside	75
South Tyneside	100
Sunderland	100
Avon	100
Bedfordshire	96
Berkshire	100
Buckinghamshire	76
Cambridgeshire	100
Cheshire	99
Cleveland	100
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	100
Cumbria	93
Derbyshire	94
Devon	100
Dorset	88
Durham	97
East Sussex	66
Essex	100
Gloucestershire	100
Hampshire	90
Hereford and Worcester	100
Hertfordshire	99
Humberside	99
Isle of Wight	96
Kent	99
Lancashire	95
Leicestershire	81
Lincolnshire	100
Norfolk	75
North Yorkshire	99
Northamptonshire	100
Northumberland	98
Nottinghamshire	93
Oxfordshire	87
Shropshire	98
Somerset	98
Staffordshire	96
Suffolk	100
Surrey	98
Warwickshire	100
West Sussex	99
Wiltshire	98
England	95

Chorlton School

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *449*, if he will detail the steps taken by the Secretary of State to expedite the matters regarding Chorlton school between 25 July and 30 September and between 30 September and 5 December; when he became aware that the pupil in question had already commenced her secondary school career; and if he will publish the information provided by Manchester local education authority that led him to conclude that he did not need to issue a formal directive to the school.

Mr. Fallon: Officials wrote to the chairman of governors of Chorlton school on 22 July, asking the school to comply with Trafford LEA's request for information

and saying that if the governing body failed without good reason to meet this request, the Secretary of State would be minded to direct it to do so. Because of the holiday period, the full governing body did not meet to consider the issue until 10 September. Since the governors did not agree at that meeting to provide the necessary information, my right hon. and learned Friend decided to require them to do so by issuing a direction under section 68 of the Education Act 1944.

The issue of direction was delayed because the Manchester LEA told officials at a meeting on 4 October that it planned to discuss the case with the governors on 9 October. Immediately after the 9 October meeting, solicitors acting for the governors asked for a full list of the pupils concerned, and confirmed on 21 October that the necessary information would be supplied to Trafford. However, despite repeated requests from the Department, the information was not forthcoming, and my right hon. and learned Friend issued his direction on 5 December. The information requested has now been supplied and Trafford hopes to consider outstanding cases within the next fortnight.

My right hon. and learned Friend was not informed that the hon. Member's constituent was already attending secondary school, although it is common in complex admission cases for pupils to attend school pending the final outcome of their appeal.

Local Management of Schools

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many local education authorities have already delegated 84 per cent. of their funds to schools.

Mr. Fallon *[pursuant to his reply, 10 December 1991 c. 409-12]*: I have today announced a number of developments which will extend local management of schools—LMS—to every school in England, and will ensure that all schools have more freedom to run their own affairs. These are:

(1) the approval of the remaining 12 inner London LEAs' schemes;

(2) the approval of 60 LEA proposals for secondary schools to have their own bank accounts;

(3) an exemption for most small schools from the competitive tendering requirements that apply to all LEAs;

(4) confirmation that LMS schemes will extend to cover special schools.

These developments set the seal on the success of LMS. From 1 April, an LMS scheme will operate in each of the 109 LEAs in England.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Suspended Sittings

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to enable motions under Standing Order No. 10 (Sittings of the House (Suspended Sittings)) to be moved by any hon. Member.

Mr. MacGregor: No.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Boarding Schools

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* for each local education authority and *(b)* by location, the current state-owned boarding schools and the pupil establishment for each school.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

School	*Education and Library Board Area*	*Boarders*	*Overall Enrolments (Inc Boarders)*
Coleraine High	North-Eastern	47	711
Thornfield, Special, Newtownabbey	North-Eastern	13	69
Fleming Fulton, Special, Belfast	Belfast	16	172
Beechlawn, Special, Hillsborough	South-Eastern	20	201
Killard House, Special, Newtownards	South-Eastern	20	210
Fallowfield, Special, Lurgan	Southern	25	25

Health Service Staff

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what studies have been conducted, or are under way, into the administrative workloads of doctors, nurses and clinical staff in the professions associated with medicine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: No studies which specifically examine the administrative workloads of these staff groups have been undertaken, or are currently planned. However, manpower planning in units of management will address the duties of medical and nursing staff in reprofiling and skill mix exercises. The duties of junior doctors will also be scrutinised within the current initiative to reduce their hours.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many sales of capital assets have arisen from closures of mental handicap hospitals; and if he will list the assets disposed of and the money raised by each sale.

Mr. Hanley: To date, two small mental handicap hospitals have been sold, namely:

Hospital	*Year of disposal*	*Money realised £*
Cultra House	1988	800,000
Drumarg House	1989	40,000

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number, for each regional health authority, of in-patient residents in health service facilities for patients with a mental handicap for each year since 1981; and what proportion of the reduction in numbers is due to discharge and what proportion due to death, in each regional health authority.

Mr. Hanley: The table shows the number of patients with a mental handicap resident in mental handicap hospitals and units in Northern Ireland at 31 December each year from 1981 to 1990. It is not possible to calculate the proportions of the reduction due to discharge or to deaths as the data on admissions and discharges collected centrally do not relate to individual patients.

Year	*Number of Patients*
1981	1,737
1982	1,712
1983	1,577
1984	1,599
1985	1,577
1986	1,509
1987	1,434
1988	1,412
1989	1,296
1990	1,185

Terrorism

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims have been made against the Northern Ireland Office in respect of fatalities and injuries which have occurred from activities by the security forces against terrorists in each of the last five years; and what sums have been paid in compensation.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, under the provisions of the statutory compensation scheme in Northern Ireland, no compensation can be paid to, or in respect of a criminal injury to, any person who has been engaged in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism.

Harbour Authorities (Members)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of the members of *(a)* Warrenpoint harbour authority and *(b)* Belfast harbour commissioners; and if he will identify with which user firms of these harbours each of those persons are associated.

Mr. Needham: The members of Warrenpoint harbour authority and Belfast harbour commissioners are:

Warrenpoint harbour authority

Member	*User firm*
H. J. Armstrong (Chairman)	—
B. Campbell	—
S. Fearon	—
E. Gaynor	Cawoods of Northern Ireland Ltd.
Q. Goldie	—
E. Haughey	—
Councillor J. V. McCart	—
Miss H. E. Roulston	—
J. Wright	—

Belfast harbour commissioners

Member	*User firm*
D. Moreland (Chairman)	—
R. Barnett (Deputy Chairman)	W. and R. Barnett Ltd.
Councillor Mrs. M. Clarke	—
T. R. Corry	J. P. Corry Ltd.
F. Cushnahan	—
G. R. Irwin	—
Mrs. C. M. Kennedy	—
K. Lagan	Lagan Holdings Ltd.
S. McVeigh	—
F. D. Tughan	—

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the annual salary of the part-time chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board.

Mr. Needham: The salary paid to the chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board is £22,195 per annum.

Forestry Production

Mr. John. D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to increase forestry production in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The current timber production by the Forest Service in Northern Ireland is about 200,000 m^3 per annum. This is projected to increase to 250,000 m^3 per annum by the end of the decade.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions during each year since 1986 a loss of electricity supply has been experienced in each district council area in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Northern Ireland Electricity does not hold information on electricity supply interruptions by district council area.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals there are to improve electricity supply in (i) south Armagh and (ii) the rest of the Newry and Armagh constituency.

Mr. Needham: Northern Ireland Electricity has completed a detailed study of electricity supply in the south Down/south Armagh area and work has commenced on a £5·5 million programme to strengthen the supply system in the area.

Railway Crossings

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many open railway level crossings, for which appropriate orders have been laid, have been converted to half-barrier crossings.

Mr. Needham: I am advised by the management of Northern Ireland Railways that, the orders to convert them from open crossings having come into effect, six automatic half-barrier crossings have been commissioned. Details are set out in the table:

Crossing	*Date commissioned*
Slaght	2 September 1991
Galgorm	30 September 1991
Cromore	20 December 1991

Crossing	*Date commissioned*
Broughdone	13 January 1992
Glarryford	20 January 1992
Killagan	27 January 1992

Note: In each case the barrier was commissioned on the same day as the order came into effect.

EMPLOYMENT

Offshore Installations (Safety)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will introduce a licensing fee for offshore oil companies to cover or to contribute towards the cost of the health and safety inspectors in charge of offshore oil safety provisions.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the answer that I gave him on 4 February 1992, *Official Report*, column *117*.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Employment Department group has a number of computer systems, many of which are small. The EDG's systems are registered under, and fully comply with, the Data Protection Act, which compels the recording of all sources and disclosures of data. None of them has links with the police national computer and few have links outside the EDG.

The criteria for participation in computer systems which require links with those in other organisations are legality, business need and priority. The EDG uses computer systems for financial management and payments. For example, payment reconciliation information is received by tape from HMSO, salaries are paid using links to the bankers automated clearing service and in the Employment Service there are tape links between the benefit-related payments system, and its successor employment service payments, and the Department of Social Security's national insurance recording system and giro reconciliation systems. In the Health and Safety Executive, terminal access to some of its systems is provided to other organisations, and vice versa, where there are joint responsibilities—for example, with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for pesticide information. Statistical information is supplied to meet legislative requirements, and to external bodies. A variety of data on employment-linked issues is made available.

Significant systems on which the EDG is involved in discussions are the inter-department business register, which would hold a register of employers, and an inter-departmental alert scheme for toxic substances. The proposed Employment Service local office system is planned to have links to exchange client data with the national unemployment benefit system, which is operated by the Employment Service as the paying agent on behalf of the Department of Social Security.

Travel-to-interview Scheme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the regional distribution of uptake and costs of the travel-to-interview scheme for 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Cash Limits

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for changes to his Department's cash limits or running costs limits for 1991-92.

Mr. Howard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made: the cash limit for class VI, vote 1—programmes and central services—will be reduced by £8,730,000 from £2,438,307,000 to £2,429,577,000.

There are a number of changes to reallocate provision within the vote. They mainly reflect changes in demand for various programmes and are as follows: a £17,500,000 increase for the small firms loan guarantee scheme; a £13,000,000 increase for the technical and vocational education initiative; a £13,500,000 increase for youth training; a £5,500,000 increase for expenditure on the national records of achievement; an increase of £4,514,000 for working capital loans made to training and enterprise councils for youth training, employment training, the enterprise allowance scheme and employment action and offset by receipts on these loans; an increase of £4,500,000 on capital expenditure; decreased receipts of £2,200,000 from the small-firms loan guarantee scheme; an increase of £1,500,000 for the training credits for young people pilot scheme; and increase of £9,659,000 running costs partially met by transfers from other votes within the group and increased receipts from the national insurance fund; a £59,773,000 decrease in provision for employment training; a £16,321,000 decrease in provision for the local initiative fund; a decrease of £12,644,000 in the contribution from the Welsh Office, class XVI, vote 4, in respect of the cost of services in Wales; and a £5,000,000 decrease in provision for business and enterprise support. The decrease in the cash limit on this vote more than offsets an increase of £2,000,000 on class VI, vote 3.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 2—Employment Service—will be increased by a token £1,000 from £488,880,000 to £488,881,000. This is the net result of an increase of £24,630,000 in running costs, mainly in connection with the administration of unemployment benefit payments; an increase of £5,348,000 for capital expenditure, also mainly in connection with administering unemployment benefit payments; a net decrease of £1,797,000 in programme provision, which includes £200,000 provision for a pilot scheme to assist lone parents to return to work; increased receipts of £27,532,000 from the Department of Social Security—class XI, vote 4—and other minor changes, mainly in connection with the ES revenue generation scheme.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 3—Health and Safety Commission and Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service—will be increased by £339,000 from £178,806,000 to £179,145,000. This increase is offset by a reduction of the cash limit on class VI, vote 1. The increase is the net result of an increase of £2,000,000 from vote 1 for capital expenditure; increased receipts of £451,000 from the Department of Transport—class VII, vote 2—for the railways inspectorate work carried out by the Health and Safety Executive; and transfer of running costs of £1,150,000 from the Health and Safety Executive and £60,000 from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service to the Department of Employment—vote 1.

The running costs limit for the Department of Employment—votes 1 and 2—will be increased by £34,289,000 from £1,102,424,000 to £1,136,713,000. The running costs limit for the Health and Safety Commission and Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service—vote 3—will be decreased by £1,210,000 from £153,023,000 to £151,813,000.

Those increases are either offset as described above or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the workings of the loan guarantee scheme; and what amendments have been made in its operation since it was introduced.

Mr. Forth: The loan guarantee scheme was introduced to assist viable small firms which are unable to raise conventional finance due to lack of security or track record. By providing a 70 per cent. guarantee—85 per cent. in inner-city task force areas—the scheme encourages banks and other financial institutions to lend where they would normally be unable to do so.

In return for the guarantee the Department charges the borrower an annual premium of 2·5 per cent.—2 per cent. in inner-city task force areas—of the guaranteed portion of the outstanding loan.

Since the scheme began in June 1981 the major changes affecting the scheme have been:

1984

Premium charge increased from an initial 3 per cent. to 5 per cent. per year on the guaranteed portion of the loan.

1985

Administrative responsibility for the scheme moved from Department of Trade and Industry to Department of Employment.

1986

Premium charge reduced from 5 per cent. to 2·5 per cent. per year on the guaranteed portion of the loan.

1988

Simplified arrangements introduced for loans of £15,000 or less.

85 per cent. guarantee for businesses in Inner City Task Force areas introduced.

1990

Premium percentage reduced to 2 per cent. for those businesses in Inner City Task Force Areas.

Agriculture and horticulture became business activities eligible for Scheme assistance.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications there have been under the loan guarantee scheme in each year since its introduction.

Mr. Forth: The number of applications under the loan guarantee scheme in each year since its introduction in June 1981 has been:

	Number
1981-82	3,351
1982-83	6,045
1983-84	4,889
1984-85	2,081
1985-86	543
1986-87	1,042
1987-88	1,222
1988-89	2,266
1989-90	3,214
1990-91	3,394
[1]1991-92	2,155

[1] To 31 December 1991.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the cost to the Government of underwriting the loan guarantee scheme in each year since its introduction.

Mr. Forth: Information on scheme expenditure prior to the Department of Employment becoming responsible for the scheme is not available. For subsequent years the net cost to the Government was:

	£ million
1985-86	27·1
1986-87	11·2
1987-88	3·6
1988-89	3·8
1989-90	5·6
1990-91	16·5
[1]1991-92	20·6

[1] To 31 December 1992.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many failures there have been in the loan guaranteee scheme in each year since its inception.

Mr. Forth: Figures prior to June 1987 are not available by individual financial year. The numbers of failures by financial year since July 1987 were:

	Numbers
Total up to June 1987	6,164
1987-88 (from July 1987)	248
1988-89	402
1989-90	656
1990-91	1,310
1991-92 (to December 1991)	1,348
Overall total	10,128

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the planned programme for the conclusion of the technical and vocational education initiative.

Mr. Jackson: The technical and vocational educational initiative (TVEI) is a 10-year programme, running from 1987 to 1997, in which education authorities participate for up to seven years. Some authorities are nearing the end of their contracts. The Department is working with these authorities on the development of plans for assimilating the lessons of TVEI and will continue to include them in any arrangements for disseminating information or other outcomes from the national programme, and to encourage the continuation of networking arrangements.

Income Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the mean, median, quartile and decile earnings for *(a)* manual workers in manufacturing and *(b)* non-manuals in the non-manufacturing private sector together with the numbers represented by each of the two categories; and in each case what was the increase in real earnings since 1979.

Mr. Forth: Information on the mean, median, quartile and decile earnings, and sample numbers, for manual workers in manufacturing, may be found in tables 54, 56, 74 and 76 of part C of the new earnings survey reports from 1979 onwards. Figures for the non-manufacturing private sector are not available.

Information on the retail prices index (all items) to convert 1979 figures to 1991 prices is published in table 6.4 of the latest *Employment Gazette* for April 1991, and in table 26 of the annual supplement to "Economic Trends" for April of earlier years. Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the figures corresponding to table 19 of part A of the 1991 new earnings survey for manual workers in manufacturing industry and for non-manuals in the non-manufacturing private sector, together with the total numbers represented by each category.

Mr. Forth; The information available from the 1991 new earnings survey closest to that requested is given in the following table. Figures for non-manual workers in the non-manufacturing private sector are not available.

Distribution of gross weekly earnings: Manual employees in manufacturing April 1991

Numbers in sample with weekly earnings in the range	*All employees, including those receiving no pay*		
	Full-time		*Part-time*
(£100-110 means £100 or more but less than £110)	*Males on adult rates*	*Females on adult rates*	*Females on adult rates*
Nil	163	106	63
Others under £100	326	638	1,065
£100-110	152	319	75
£110-120	195	396	52
£120-130	306	472	40
£130-140	389	439	30
£140-150	469	443	15
£150-160	578	421	12
£160-170	649	323	7
£170-180	707	306	13
£180-190	792	221	6
£190-200	837	181	3
£200-210	932	155	5
£210-230	1,854	224	2
£230-270	3,390	239	3
£270-300	2,017	95	2
£300-330	1,496	46	1
£330-360	954	26	—
£360-390	685	15	—
£390-420	459	3	—
£420-480	507	8	1
£480-540	246	1	—
£540-600	146	2	2
£600-700	97	1	—
£700 and more	50	1	—
Number of employees included	18,396	5,081	1,397

Note: "—" denotes nil.
Source: New Earnings Survey.

Distribution of gross weekly earnings: Manual employees in manufacturing

April 1991

Numbers in sample with weekly earnings in the range	*Employees whose pay was unaffected by absence*		
	Full-time		*Part-time*
(£100-£110 means £100 or more but less than £110)	*Males on adult rates*	*Females on adult rates*	*Females on adult rates*
Nil	—	—	—
Others under £100	72	250	896
£100-£110	87	235	73
£110-£120	141	317	46
£120-£130	209	370	35
£130-£140	302	353	28
£140-£150	360	380	15
£150-£160	473	378	11
£160-£170	547	302	7
£170-£180	592	276	12
£180-£190	690	203	4
£190-£200	719	171	3
£200-£210	824	139	5
£210-£230	1,665	210	2
£230-£270	3,101	225	3
£270-£300	1,869	82	2
£300-£330	1,411	44	1
£330-£360	890	24	—
£360-£390	644	14	—
£390-£420	433	2	—
£420-£480	481	8	—
£480-£540	229	1	—
£540-£600	138	2	1
£600-£700	88	1	—
£700 and more	47	—	—
Number of employees included	16,012	3,987	1,143

Source: New Earnings Survey.
Note: "—" denotes nil.

Gross weekly earnings
Manual employees in manufacturing
April 1991

		Employees whose pay was unaffected by absence		
		Full-time		*Part-time*
		Males on adult rates	*Females on adult rates*	*Females on adult rates*
Mean	£	261·8	162·1	78·0
Highest decile	£	379·9	230·5	n/a
Upper quartile	£	306·5	186·4	n/a
Median	£	246·5	151·9	n/a

		Employees whose pay was unaffected by absence		
		Full-time		*Part-time*
		Males on adult rates	*Females on adult rates*	*Females on adult rates*
Lower quartile	£	197·3	125·1	n/a
Lowest decile	£	159·1	106·6	n/a
As percentage of the median				
Highest decile		154·1	151·8	n/a
Upper quartile		124·3	122·7	n/a
Lower quartile		80·0	82·3	n/a
Lowest decile		64·5	70·2	n/a
Standard error of mean	£	0·76	0·86	1·20
Percentage standard error (mean)		0·29	0·53	1·54
Standard error of median	£	0·92	0·69	n/a
Percentage standard error (median)		0·37	0·46	n/a

Source: New Earnings Survey.
n/a—Denotes not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the mean, median, quartile and decile earnings for part-time employees, excluding those who received no pay for the survey period together with the numbers and aggregate incomes of those earning less than £54 and between £54 and £100 per week; and if he will provide corresponding figures for 1979 which likewise distinguish between part-time workers earning less than the lower earnings limit and between that limit and the ceiling for the lowest income category.

Mr. Forth: Information from the 1991 new earnings survey on the weekly earnings of part-time employees on adult rates is published in table 19 of part A of the survey report, a copy of which is in the Library. These figures relate to *(a)* all employees, and *(b)* employees whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence. Figures excluding employees who received no pay for the survey period are not available, except for mean (average) earnings, which were as follows in April 1991 (£ per week).

Men £	*Women* £	*All* £
101·4	83·1	85·5

Projections for 1992-93 concerning part-time employees earning less than £54 (the National Insurance lower earnings limit), excluding those with no earnings, and between £54 and £100, are as follows:

	Numbers	*Aggregate earnings*
Less than £54	2·25 million	£4 billion
£54—£100	1·50 million	£6 billion

Comparable figures for 1979 are not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether, further to table 12 of part A of the 1991 new earnings survey, he will publish a table showing the mean, median, quartile and decile earnings for *(a)* manual workers in manufacturing and *(b)* non-manuals in the non-manufacturing private sector in the Greater London sub-region and in the west midlands region, together with the numbers represented by each category in each region.

Mr. Forth: Information on the mean earnings, and sample numbers, for manual workers in manufacturing, for Greater London and for the west midlands, may be found in tables 118 and 120 of part E of the new earnings survey reports from 1979 onwards. There is no available information for median, quartile and decile earnings for manufacturing on a regional basis. Figures for the mean, median, quartile and decile earnings for non-manuals, in the non-manufacturing private sector, are not available. Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Toxic Emissions (Merseyside)

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place a copy in the Library of the health and safety inspector's report on emissions and leaks of toxic fluids and gases on Merseyside.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) investigations into the circumstances of recent incidents involving emissions and leaks of toxic fluids and gases on Merseyside are continuing. At this stage HSE has no plans to publish reports on its investigations into these incidents.

HEALTH

Management Executive

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the present work, research and development programmes of the NHS management executive with regard to the assessment of the health of the population and the cost effectiveness of present spending programmes.

Mr. Dorrell: The assessment of health need is the responsibility of district health authorities. The management executive offers a wide range of support to local health needs assessment and the assessment of cost effectiveness of services.

Expenditure

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish an updated table of hospital and county health service programme expenditure by age group comparable with that for 1986-87 supplied to the Social Services Select Committee in 1988 and publish such a table both in cash terms and cash adjusted for NHS pay and prices using the same base as the 1986-87 table.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table. The expenditure relates only to that by regional health authorities and excludes expenditure on certain centrally financed services, and on joint finance with the personal social services, as well as all expenditure on family health services.

The methodology for estimating the distribution of expenditure by age has been revised since the 1986-87 estimates were made, largely as a result of changes in the way in which financial data are reported. The figures for 1989-90 are therefore not comparable with the figures for 1986-87.

Changes in input volumes are an inadequate guide to the level of service the NHS can be expected to achieve, since they do not reflect the continuing success of the NHS in increasing the efficiency with which it uses resources. The table therefore also shows expenditure figures in real terms, ie adjusted by the GDP deflator.

Hospital and community health service
Estimated gross current expenditure by age

£ million

Age bands	*(1) Expenditure in 1986-87 (Cash)*	*(2) Expenditure in 1989-90 (Cash)*	*(3) Expenditure in 1989-90 In real terms*[1]	*(4) Expenditure in 1989-90 In volume terms*[2]
All births	742·3	888·4	738·1	692·1
0 to 4	590·6	645·8	536·6	503·1
5 to 15	641·5	662·3	550·3	516·0
16 to 44	1,795·9	2,365·7	1,965·6	1,842·9
45 to 64	1,521·7	2,623·9	2,180·1	2,044·0
65 to 74	1,738·1	2,292·8	1,905·0	1,786·1
75 to 84	2,318·1	2,650·7	2,202·4	2,064·9
85 plus	876·2	1,336·5	1,110·4	1,041·1
Total, all ages	10,224·4	13,466·0	11,188·5	10,490·0

[1] In 1986-87 prices after allowing for changes in general inflation as measured by the GDP deflator.
[2] In 1986-87 prices after allowing for changes in HCHS pay and prices.

Child Protection

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to support moves towards introducing approved or accredited social workers to tackle complex child protection cases.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are in discussion with the local authority associations, the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) and the Association of Directors of Social Services on this issue.

Liverpool (Proposed Hospital)

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds will be in *(a)* the acute and *(b)* the recovery wings of the proposed new obstetrics and gynaecology hospital in Liverpool.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is planned that there will be a total of 263 beds, of which 163 will be acute.

Asthma

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the reported level of asthma sufferers, by age range of 0-11, 11-21, 21-45 and over 45 years for each London health district from 1980 to the present.

Mr. Dorrell: Information in the form requested is not held centrally. The vast majority of asthma sufferers do not attend hospital as in-patients.

Prescriptions (Respiratory Drugs)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of children's prescriptions, by family practitioner committee area, of ventolin or equivalent respiratory drugs for each year since 1980.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Health Units (Deficits)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish his Department's analysis of regions' deficits—"Financial management of the NHS: Winter 1991-92, DMU and Trust deficits", month nine report;

(2) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-ended deficit and current deficit of the London Ambulance Service;

(3) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-end deficit and the current deficit in Bloomsbury and Islington district health authority;

(4) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-end deficit in the Camberwell district health authority;

(5) if he will make a statement about current and recent deficit forecast year-end deficits in *(a)* the West Suffolk district health authority and *(b)* the Cambridge district health authority;

(6) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-end deficit at the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond street;

(7) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-end deficit at *(a)* the Royal Surrey county trust, *(b)* the Nuffield orthopaedic centre and *(c)* the North West Hertfordshire mental handicap unit;

(8) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the current financial situation for both capital and revenue and *(b)* the forecast year-end deficit, at Guy's hospital;

(9) if he will make a statement about the deficit and forecast year-end deficit at St. Bartholomew's hospital;

(10) if he will make a statement about the number of units reporting current deficits above £100,000 in January 1992;

(11) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-end deficit in the national heart and chest hospitals special health authority;

(12) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-end deficit in the *(a)* South West Hertfordshire district health authority and *(b)* Riverside health authority;

(13) if he will make a statement about the year-end deficit and current deficit in the Bromsgrove and Redditch district health authority;

(14) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-end deficit and current deficit in the Basingstoke district health authority;

(15) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-end deficit in East Surrey district health authority;

(16) if he will make a statement about the forecast year-end deficit and current deficit at the *(a)* Salford and *(b)* South Manchester district health authorities.

Mr. Dorrell: The recently leaked internal management document to which the questions refer contained unaudited management information, some of which has been overtaken by events. The proper way of reporting the financial position of the National Health Service and its component parts is in the annual accounts of these bodies for 1991-92, which will be published in due course.

Community Care

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress being made in implementing the Government's community care reforms.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The policies set out in the White Paper "Caring for People" are widely supported by local authorities, health authorities, voluntary organisations, practitioners in the field and many other interested commentators. The objectives are that good quality local services are provided that are responsive to the needs of users and carers, that provide choice and that enable elderly, disabled or vulnerable people to live as independently as possible in their own homes or in homely settings in the community. The Government attach particular importance to the successful implementation of these reforms.

Special monitoring arrangements have been established. The regional social services inspectorate and regional health authorities have been asked to submit six-monthly reports on the progress being made by authorities in their regions against a checklist of issues. The first reports were submitted at the end of September.

These reports showed that overall, satisfactory progress was being made at that stage in implementing the reforms. Most local authorities had met the specific requirements of the first phase of implementation by establishing complaints procedures and "arm's-length" inspection units for residential homes by 1 April 1991. They were also establishing a wide range of projects under the new mental illness specific grant which supports £30 million of expenditure in 1991-92 and £43·6 million in 1992-93 and under the new alcohol and drug misuse specific grant which supports £2 million of expenditure in 1991-92 and £3 million in 1992-93. Nearly all are on course to produce their first community care plans for 1 April 1992. A number of local authorities were making progress in clarifying the different "purchaser" and "provider" roles within the authority. We expect all authorities to make progress on this issue in the next few months. It is also clear that the degree of collaboration between health and local authorities which is essential to successful implementation has notably improved and that many authorities are making significant efforts to involve voluntary organisations, users and carers in preparing their plans.

Authorities should now be addressing the detail of the reforms' implications, having undertaken much of the necessary groundwork for full implementation by 1 April 1993. At that stage, local authorities must have in place needs-based assessment systems. Funds will also be transferred to them from the Department of Social Security to enable them to arrange care for those people who would have entered residential or nursing home care and looked to the Department of Social Security for financial support. Implementing the remaining aspects of the reforms will be a challenging task. Local and health authorities will need to tackle a number of difficult issues. Closer collaboration will also be required between authorities generally and independent sector providers of community care services. The next round of the monitoring exercise will concentrate on those aspects to which authorities must give priority in order to achieve a smooth and successful introduction of the remainder of the changes required by legislation. Once these elements are in place authorities will be in a good position to take advantage of the opportunities created and to develop more appropriate and more responsive services to meet the needs of users and carers.

NHS Estate

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state for each NHS region the amount needed for repairs and maintenance to bring the estate to an overall condition which exhibits only minor deterioration.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 12 July 1991, *Official Report*, at columns *500-4*. That gave the figures at March 1990; the final figures at March 1991 are not yet available.

Ko Hsuan School, Chawleigh

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will institute an inquiry into the welfare of children at the Ko Hsuan school in Chawleigh, north Devon.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I understand that a joint social services and police investigation took place on 3 February and that the findings of the investigation are now being studied. We do not anticipate the need for a Government inquiry at this time. We will, however, keep the situation under review.

Under the terms of the Children Act 1989 the proprietors of the school have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children accommodated in the school.

Children's Beds (Oxfordshire)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the proposed rationalisation of children's beds in Oxfordshire district health authority; and what are the *(a)* current and *(b)* forecast end of year deficits for the authority.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her today. I understand that Oxfordshire health authority has no plans to rationalise children's beds.

Novopen Needles

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to end the charging of diabetics for supplies of Novopen needles.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Needles for insulin injection pens including Novopens are not compatible with conventional syringes and so arrangements for both pens and needles have to be considered together. We are currently reviewing the case for making both these items available on GP prescription.

NHS Trusts

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by regional health authority, those units and hospitals which are not in the first, second or third waves of trusts, and which are eligible to apply for trust status.

Mr. Dorrell: Any NHS hospital or other unit involved directly in patient care may apply for NHS trust status.

National Blood Authority

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of the consultation exercise into establishing a national blood authority.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) on 29 January at column *586*.

Ambulances

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will state for each metropolitan ambulance authority *(a)* the percentage of emergency calls responded to within seven minutes and *(b)* the percentage of emergency calls responded to within 14 minutes for each quarter since March 1991;

(2) if he will state for each non-metropolitan ambulance authority *(a)* the percentage of emergency calls responded to within eight minutes and *(b)* the percentage of emergency calls responded to within 20 minutes for each quarter since March 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 24 January at columns *391-96*.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *392-94*, if he will give corresponding figures for ambulance response times for the years 1983 and 1987.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested was not collected centrally until the financial year 1987-88.

The tables show the numbers and percentages of emergency calls being responded to within the standards of eight and 20 minutes for non-metropolitan authorities and seven and 14 minutes for metropolitan authorities for 1987-88.

Patient transport services: Table 1
1987-88
Quality of service
Emergency calls: response times: non-metropolitan authorities *England*

Ambulance authority	*Total number of emergency calls*	*Number where response within 7-8 minutes*	*Percentage of calls where response within 7-8 minutes*	*Time at 50th percentile (minutes)*
Cleveland	23,890	18,200	76·2	6·0
Cumbria	12,562	7,828	62·3	6·2
Durham	29,098	17,243	59·3	7·3
Humberside	42,403	30,455	71·8	6·0
North Yorkshire	19,361	12,711	65·7	5·9
Derbyshire	32,556	17,944	55·1	8·0
Leicestershire	31,129	19,304	62·0	8·0
Lincolnshire	16,237	10,300	63·4	7·0
Nottinghamshire	58,018	35,332	60·9	8·0
Cambridgeshire	16,807	[illegible],526	50·7	8·0
Norfolk	25,151	16,028	63·7	6·4
Suffolk	10,313	5,641	54·7	7·5
Bedfordshire	19,495	12,216	62·7	7·0
Hertfordshire	35,981	19,983	55·5	8·0
Essex	62,107	28,901	46·5	8·0
East Sussex	35,221	24,541	69·7	6·0
Kent	51,272	31,709	61·8	7·0
Surrey	47,151	25,984	55·1	6·0
West Sussex	5,734	3,658	63·8	7·0
Dorset	23,200	14,130	60·9	6·2
Hampshire	46,996	24,017	51·1	7·3
Wiltshire	13,452	8,123	60·4	6·6
Isle of Wight	4,199	2,376	56·6	7·1
Berkshire	22,538	10,481	46·5	7·0
Buckinghamshire	16,511	10,060	60·9	7·0
Northamptonshire	18,381	8,361	45·5	7·1
Oxfordshire	12,556	7,187	57·2	7·0
Avon	31,327	20,573	65·7	8·0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	14,581	6,658	45·7	9·0
Devon	33,875	21,284	62·8	7·0
Gloucestershire	14,133	9,227	65·3	7·0
Somerset	9,575	5,704	59·6	6·0
Hereford and Worcester	17,482	11,888	68·0	6·0
Shropshire	12,333	6,340	51·4	7·9
Staffordshire	33,875	21,284	62·8	7·0
Warwickshire	13,019	8,643	66·4	6·8
Cheshire	33,031	17,308	52·4	8·0
Lancashire	70,509	49,845	70·7	6·2

Source: KA34.
DH Statistics and Management Information (SM12B)1992.

Patient transport services: Table 2
1987-88
Quality of service
Emergency calls: response times: non-metropolitan authorities

England

Ambulance authority	*Total number of emergency calls*	*Number where response within 14-20 minutes*	*Percentage of calls where response within 14-20 minutes*	*Time at 95th percentile (minutes)*
Cleveland	23,890	23,353	97·8	12·0
Cumbria	12,562	11,855	94·4	20·7
Durham	29,098	28,691	98·6	16·4
Humberside	42,403	42,276	99·7	14·0
North Yorkshire	19,361	18,317	94·6	16·5
Derbyshire	32,556	31,579	97·0	18·0
Leicestershire	31,129	30,462	97·9	17·0
Lincolnshire	16,237	15,572	95·9	20·0
Nottinghamshire	58,018	56,139	96·8	18·0
Cambridgeshire	16,807	15,459	92·0	18·0
Norfolk	25,151	24,441	97·2	17·7
Suffolk	10,313	9,336	90·5	20·5
Bedfordshire	19,495	18,922	97·1	17·0
Hertfordshire	35,981	34,666	96·3	18·0
Essex	62,107	53,709	86·5	17·0
East Sussex	35,221	32,543	92·4	14·0
Kent	51,272	49,536	96·6	18·0
Surrey	[illegible]7,151	27,044	57·4	13·0
West Sussex	5,734	4,529	79·0	21·0
Dorset	23,200	20,770	89·5	16·4
Hampshire	46,996	40,645	86·5	16·5
Wiltshire	13,452	12,777	95·0	17·0
Isle of Wight	4,199	3,951	94·1	19·3
Berkshire	22,538	21,989	97·6	16·0
Buckinghamshire	16,511	15,711	95·2	15·5
Northamptonshire	18,381	16,779	91·3	15·3
Oxfordshire	12,556	11,818	94·1	20·0
Avon	31,327	30,526	97·4	20·0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	14,581	13,173	90·3	25·0
Devon	33,875	32,179	95·0	18·0
Gloucestershire	14,133	13,900	98·4	17·0
Somerset	9,575	8,921	93·2	19·0
Hereford and Worcester	17,482	17,132	98·0	16·0
Shropshire	12,333	11,648	94·4	19·6
Staffordshire	33,875	32,179	95·0	18·0
Warwickshire	13,019	12,700	97·5	16·8
Cheshire	33,031	31,544	95·5	20·0
Lancashire	70,509	69,883	99·1	13·8

Source: KA34.
DH Statistics and Management Information (SM12B) 1992.

Patient Transport Services: Table 3
1987-88
Quality of service
Emergency calls: Response times: Metropolitan authorities

Ambulance authority	*Total number of emergency calls*	*Number where response within 7 to 8 minutes*	*Percentage of calls where response within 7 to 8 minutes*	*Time at 50th percentile (minutes)*
Northumbria Metropolitan	61,148	36,689	60·0	7·0
West Yorkshire Metropolitan	108,519	33,661	31·0	9·0
South Yorkshire Metropolitan	[illegible]9,099	20,741	42·2	7·9
London Ambulance Service	[illegible]70,348	97,903	20·8	10·0
West Midlands Metropolitan	115,081	44,698	38·8	7·6
Mersey Metropolitan	108,541	61,161	56·3	6·5
Greater Manchester Metropolitan	149,255	73,135	49·0	7·3

Source: KA34 DH Statistics and Management Information (SM12B) 1992.

Patient Transport Services: Table 4
1987-88
Quality of service
Emergency calls: Response times: Metropolitan authorities

Ambulance authority	*Total number of emergency calls*	*Number where response within 14 to 20 minutes*	*Percentage of calls where response within 14 to 20 minutes*	*Time at 95th percentile (minutes)*
Northumbria Metropolitan	61,148	59,314	97·0	13·0
West Yorkshire Metropolitan	108,519	89,918	82·9	19·0
South Yorkshire Metropolitan	49,099	43,467	88·5	16·4
London Ambulance Service	470,348	400,610	85·2	19·0
West Midlands Metropolitan	115,081	109,788	95·4	13·8
Mersey Metropolitan	108,541	103,478	95·3	13·8
Greater Manchester Metropolitan	149,255	140,300	94·0	14·7

Source: KA34 DH Statistics and Management Information (SM12B) 1992.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the average length of service expected from emergency ambulance vehicles in terms of *(a)* years and *(b)* miles; and if he will give for each ambulance authority the percentage of vehicles which meet those specifications.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Cancelled Operations

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state for each regional health authority *(a)* the number of scheduled operations cancelled and *(b)* the average number of operations per session held for each quarter since 31 March 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on the number of operations cancelled is not collected centrally. Statistics on the number of cases operated on in each region per scheduled session held are collected annually. Data for 1990-91 will be published in the near future in "NHS Operating Theatres Availability and Use, England, Financial year 1990-91", a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

Maternity Beds

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by national health service region *(a)* for 1980 and *(b)* for 1990-91 the hospitals in England which had consultant obstetric or general practitioner maternity beds, giving the number of beds of each type in each hospital.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The information requested for 1990-91 has been placed in the Library. Figures for 1980 and 1989-90 were placed in the Library in reply to the question from the hon. Member for Peckham on 15 March 1991 at column *709*. Due to changes in the type of information collected, the data for the years concerned are not strictly comparable. The data for 1980 identified the beds available in the type of unit concerned. Since 1987, the bed type has been classified according to clinical responsibility—by consultant, general practitioner or for joint use. In addition, many of the individual sites were not open during one or other of the years in question. While there has been an overall reduction in the number of beds over the period, this has been accompanied by a significant reduction in the average length of stay of over 30 per cent.

Home Helps

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each year since 1979 the number of home helps employed by local authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* The net expenditure on home helps and the numbers of home helps directly employed by social services departments in England (in whole time equivalent terms at 30 September) in each year are set out in the table.

	Net expenditure on home help services £ million	*Staff numbers directly employed*
1979	132·8	44,660
1980	157·1	46,637
1981	186·9	46,541
1982	205·6	47,310
1983	228·7	49,326
1984	253·6	50,561
1985	269·4	51,959
1986	296·5	53,706
1987	336·2	56,336
1988	413·1	57,004
1989	464·7	56,613
1990	519·6	55,783
	per cent.	*per cent.*
Percentage increase over the period	[1]67·0	25·0

[1] In real terms.

Note: Staff figures relate only to local authorities' directly employed staff.

Although there is a drop in the number of home helps since 1988 the expenditure on the service has been increasing, indicating that local authorities are contracting out an increasing proportion of the service to the voluntary and private sectors.

ENERGY

Orimulsion

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the latest position with regard to the issues before him relating to National Power plc's proposals to burn orimulsion at Pembroke power station; what decisions under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, or under section 10 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, are still awaited; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: South Pembrokeshire district council, a relevant planning authority, has objected to National Power plc's application under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for my right hon. Friend's consent to fit electrostatic precipitators in order to use orimulsion as the fuel for the Pembroke power station. My right hon. Friend is, therefore, statutorily obliged to call for a public inquiry to be held into the application unless the district council withdraws its objection.

Before arranging the inquiry, my right hon. Friend does, however, need to know the views of all statutory consultees, including the other relevant planning authority, Dyfed county council, in order to determine the matters that are relevant to his consideration of the application. The relevant inquiry procedure rules require him to issue a statement of such matters.

The authorisation of a licence under section 10 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 is a matter for Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department has established links with the following organisations for the following purposes:

Organisation and Purpose
HM Paymaster General—Pay-roll
Department of Trade and Industry—Accounts and Library Services
British Geological Survey—Petroleum Engineering data.
AEA—Energy Technology Data
HMIP—Radio-active Incident Monitoring.
OECD—Transferral of papers.

My Department also subscribes to several commercial databases such as Lexis and those available with BT Gold.

The main criterion used in deciding whether to join a system is whether it would further the objectives of the Department in a cost-effective manner. My Department is not linked to the police national computer. All systems which contain data on personnel are registered with the Data Protection Registrar.

Solar Energy Devices

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when his Department's programme on photovoltaic cell-based solar energy devices began; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: On 8 May, I announced that the Government would fund a programme of research into the use of solar power for electricity production. The first contract under that programme was let in June 1991. To date, contracts have been placed covering work to the value of more than £200,000. The purpose of the work is to assess the potential for photovoltaic electricity generation in the United Kingdom, particularly when incorporated into building fabric.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give the total number of staff employed by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and British Nuclear Fuels overall and at their Warrington establishment in 1979, 1987 and at the present date.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am advised that the total number of employees at the two sites in Warrington—Risley and Culcheth—in 1979, 1987 and at the start of 1992, with the overall number employed by the UKAEA and British Nuclear Fuels plc are as follows:

	Employed at Risley	*Employed at Culcheth*	*Employed overall*
1979	4,075	240	26,743
1987	4,941	290	30,315
1992	3,717	438	24,644

Renewable Energy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will obtain for his departmental library a subscription to "Renew: the Independent Journal on Renewable Energy", produced by the Network for Alternative Technology and Technology Assessment.

Mr. Wakeham: The Department has a subscription to "Renew", which is published by the Network for Alternative Technology and Technology Assessment.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the report, "Energy Efficiency and Renewables; Recent Experience on Mainland Europe", prepared by David Olivier for Energy Advisory Associates.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A copy of this report was ordered by the library of the Department of Energy on 4 February.

Nuclear Materials Convention

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to seek a strengthening of the convention on the physical protection of nuclear materials 1980.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have nothing further to add to the answer that I gave the hon. Member on 20 January 1992, at column 7.

DEFENCE

Headquarter Contracts

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total amounts paid by his Department in respect of headquarter contracts to United Kingdom-based contracts in each of the three years to 31 March 1991.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Ministry of Defence paid the following total amounts to United Kingdom-based contractors for the financial years 1988-89 to 1990-91:

	£ million
1988-89	7,776·38
1989-90	8,232·57
1990-91	9,132·48

Centrally held records do not differentiate between payments made under headquarters contracts and other types of payments. The precise information requested could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the precise amounts paid to each of the 10 contractors which received the largest shares of headquarter contracts awarded by his Department in each of the three years to 31 March 1991.

Mr. Alan Clark: The 10 contractors that received the largest payments from my Department in each of the years specified were:

	£ million
1988-89	
British Aerospace plc	1,085·94
The General Electric Co. plc	902·04
Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Consortium plc	409·31
Rolls-Royce plc	329·20
The Plessey Co. plc	308·74
Devonport Management Ltd.	236·79
Ferranti plc	209·71
Thorn EMI plc	157·95
FKI Babcock plc	151·08
GKN plc	131·88
1989-90	
BAe plc	926·39
GEC plc	785·43
VSEL Consortium plc	561·88
Rolls-Royce plc	319·73
Devonport Management plc	277·22
Plessey plc	248·44
Ferranti International plc	220·96
FKI Babcock plc	171·54
Thorn EMI plc	163·11
Westland Group plc	138·30
1990-91	
BAe plc	996·29
GEC plc	799·92
VSEL Consortium plc	591·35
Rolls-Royce plc	399·86
The Weir Group plc	293·36
GEC Siemens plc	246·13
Ferranti International plc	198·05
Babcock International Group plc	183·90
Thorn EMI plc	165·67
Vickers plc	154·48

The proportion of these sums represented by headquarters contracts could only be identified at disproportionate cost.

Low Flying (Compensation)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been paid out by his Department in respect of compensation to farmers and landowners for loss or injury to animals caused by low-flying aircraft in each of the past three years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The information is not immediately available in the form requested. As at November 1991 the cumulative amount of compensation paid in respect of livestock losses resulting from military low flying activity, for the last three financial years 1988 to 1991 was £569,313. Our information does not identify claimants by occupation.

Defence Research Agency

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the employment implications, in terms of jobs lost, gross and net, of the decision to merge the quality assurance laboratory at Woolwich with the Defence Research Agency near Farnborough and to close the outstations at Bromley, Bridgwater and Manchester; and if he will give details for each of the locations separately.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I will write to the right hon. Member.

Hunt Transport

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *213-14* what elements of the costs of transporting horses and riders to hunting meets are met from public funds.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Trident

Mr. Enright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what long-lead items for the fourth Trident submarine are under construction; how much money has been spent on them; and under what parliamentary vote the money has been committed.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Construction of steelwork and engineering items, including hull units, sub-frames, bulkheads and pumps has started under long lead funding arrangements. Expenditure to December 1991 was £138 million. Submarine construction is appropriated to Ministry of Defence vote 2F.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Mink

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on how many occasions in 1990 and 1991 his inspectors supervised, examined or monitored the slaughter of factory farm mink by injection or gassing;

(2) if he will outline the methods of gassing used to kill mink observed by his inspectors during visits to fur factory farms in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Maclean: Officers of the State Veterinary Service observed the slaughter of mink, by gassing, on four occasions in England in 1990. The methods observed involved euthanasia by carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of research carried out by his Department to ensure that the method of gassing used to kill mink on Britain's fur factory farms is humane.

Mr. Maclean: This Department has carried out no specific research into the gassing of mink. Research and obervations in other countries have concluded that gassing by carbon monoxide or carbon dioxide as practised in Britain is humane.

Premium Schemes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the amount paid out in *(a)* the sheep variable premium scheme and *(b)* the beef premium scheme at each auction market in the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Gummer: This is an operational matter for the Intervention Board executive agency whose chief executive will write to the hon. Member about the information requested.

Farm Income

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the percentage change in farming incomes in the United Kingdom after taking inflation into account in each year since 1986-87.

Mr. Curry: Details of farming incomes have recently been published in "Agriculture in the United Kingdom: 1991", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Indices of the aggregate income from farming in real terms are contained in table 6.4 and indices of average net farm income in real terms by type of farm are shown in the lower part of table 8.1.

Pollution Control

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce a grant for farmers for separating clean from dirty water similar to the grant already available for pollution control measures.

Mr. Curry: The European Community regulations on farm capital grants set a maximum rate of 35 per cent. for grants on pollution control equipment. Because we target our aid on the main items and do not cover ancillary equipment, such as clean water separation, we have persuaded the Commission to allow us to pay grant at the exceptionally high rate of 50 per cent. If we were to widen the scope of these grants we would have to match this by offsetting cuts in the grant rate.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the planned expansion of environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen) on 6 February.

Lake District

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the number of farmers eligible for the environmentally sensitive areas scheme in the Lake District national park, living in parishes which are entirely within the park and within South Lakeland district council, giving both the number of parishes concerned and the number of parishes omitted from the calculation owing to their being only partly within the park.

Mr. Curry: The precise area to be covered by the new Lake District environmentally sensitive area has not yet been decided. Proposals will be issued for consultation shortly.

Fishing Quotas

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he intends taking to prevent Dutch flag ships from increasing their share of plaice, cod and sole quotas from 1 January 1993 onwards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: As a result of the European Court ruling given in the Factortame case last year, non-British EC nationals may register fishing vessels in the United Kingdom provided those vessels are to be operated, managed and controlled from here. Such vessels are subject to United Kingdom licensing and quota management rules, but any restriction on grounds of nationality would be discriminatory and contrary to Community law.

Multi-annual Guidance Programme

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress the United Kingdom is making with fleet reductions under the multi-annual guidance programme; and when individuals in fleets such as those at Lowestoft can expect to be eligible for new build grants.

Mr. Curry: The payment of construction grants is dependent on member states meeting their multi-annual guidance programme targets. The United Kingdom did not meet its end 1991 target and 1992 to 1996 targets have not yet been promulgated.

Divisional Offices (Exeter and Truro)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he received the study relating to the future of his Ministry's Exeter and Truro divisional offices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The study was completed shortly after Christmas, but detailed consideration of its findings did not begin until after my right hon. Friend the Minister met hon. Members from Cornwall in mid-January.

SCOTLAND

Rent Arrears

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide, in relation to rent arrears for each district and islands council in Scotland for 1985-86 and each succeeding year for which the information is available *(a)* the number of tenants in arrears and this figure as a percentage of all local authority tenants, *(b)* the average and total amounts due and *(c)* the total amount as a percentage of local authorities' revenue from rents.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* The available information is shown in the following tables, which should be read in conjunction with the following notes:

(1) Information on local authority rent arrears relates to the amounts outstanding on a particular date rather than to financial years.

(2) Until 1988, rent arrears information was collected from local authorities on the basis of the position at 30 September. Thereafter, it has been collected on the basis of the position at 31 March. No information on rent arrears on any date in 1989 was collected.

(3) *Column 1* in the tables shows the number of local authority tenants who were in arrears of rent on the relevant date shown at the head of the table.

(4) *Column 2* in the tables shows for each local authority the number of tenants in arrears expressed as a percentage of the total number of tenants of that authority.

(5) *Column 3* in the tables shows the average arrears per tenant (in £) of those tenants in arrears.

(6) *Column 4* in the tables shows the total amount of arrears outstanding (in £ million) for each authority on the relevant date shown at the head of the table.

(7) *Column 5* expresses the corresponding figure shown in column 4 as a percentage of the standard rental income for the financial year in which the relevant date at the head of the table occurs.

30 September 1985	*column 1*	*column 2*	*column 3*	*column 4*	*column 5*
Berwickshire	575	22·1	75	0·043	2·3
Ettrick and Lauderdale	851	19·4	34	0·029	1·0
Roxburgh	2,374	40·5	68	0·162	3·6
Tweeddale	330	22·0	59	0·020	2·2
Clackmannan	3,226	35·3	53	0·170	3·0
Falkirk	12,859	41·1	47	0·605	3·2
Stirling	5,959	47·2	61	0·363	4·7
Annandale and Eskdale	1,291	25·4	70	0,090	2·5
Nithsdale	2,730	34·2	51	0·138	2·9
Stewartry	673	27·8	25	0·017	1·0
Wigtown	721	16·0	93	0·067	1·8
Dunfermline	6,739	33·0	69	0·467	3·6
Kirkcaldy	9,380	38·4	41	0·382	2·4
North East Fife	1,661	22·7	38	0·064	1·3
Aberdeen	5,746	15·2	99	0·569	2·6
Banff and Buchan	2,923	24·1	67	0·195	2·2
Gordon	789	14·3	49	0·038	1·0
Kincardine and Deeside	317	9·3	81	0·026	1·1
Moray	1,859	17·5	22	0·042	0·6
Badenoch and Strathspey	271	24·3	44	0·012	1·5
Caithness	960	24·5	27	0·026	1·0
Inverness	2,525	37·5	54	0·137	2·9
Lochaber	1,511	46·6	58	0·088	3·9
Nairn	223	21·0	23	0·005	0·7
Ross and Cromarty	2,882	46·6	74	0·214	5·2
Skye and Lochalsh	108	14·5	229	0·025	4·3
Sutherland	396	23·4	36	0·014	1·3
East Lothian	4,205	28·1	51	0·214	2·3
Edinburgh	16,332	31·2	61	0·993	2·8
Midlothian	4,710	40·1	52	0·244	3·4
West Lothian	6,495	30·6	23	0·151	1·1
Argyll and Bute	2,591	31·7	25	0·065	1·0
Bearsden and Milngavie	576	32·1	53	0·030	2·7
Clydebank	5,273	45·1	98	0·517	7·0
Clydesdale	1,840	19·2	40	0·074	1·2
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	2,281	52·9	173	0·394	13·8
Cumnock and Doon Valley	3,370	33·4	80	0·269	4·6
Cunninghame	5,000	22·1	34	0·170	1·6
Dumbarton	5,521	43·5	88	0·486	7·8
East Kilbride	578	39·5	61	0·036	3·5
Eastwood	193	10·5	132	0·025	2·4
Glasgow	69,126	41·1	84	5·814	6·3
Hamilton	7,988	35·2	67	0·538	4·2
Inverclyde	4,905	25·7	52	0·254	2·3
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	4,530	26·3	25	0·113	1·2
Kyle and Carrick	3,882	22·1	49	0·190	1·7
Monklands	7,126	25·2	83	0·595	3·6
Motherwell	17,611	44·9	42	0·743	3·2
Renfrew	10,770	28·3	43	0·463	2·4
Strathkelvin	4,554	44·0	103	0·469	7·4
Angus	3,143	23·5	30	0·094	1·1
Dundee	13,259	33·4	37	0·488	2·4
Perth and Kinross	4,119	27·5	32	0·133	1·4
Orkney Islands	787	53·6	43	0·034	3·4
Shetland Islands	1,080	41·0	88	0·095	4·8
Western Isles	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Rent arrears figures not available.

30 September 1986	*column 1*	*column 2*	*column 3*	*column 4*	*column 5*
Berwickshire	475	18·4	91	0·043	2·2
Ettrick and Lauderdale	863	20·2	34	0·029	1·0
Roxburgh	2,381	41·5	73	0·173	3·5
Tweeddale	282	19·1	45	0·013	1·3
Clackmannan	3,900	43·0	95	0·369	6·0
Falkirk	10,417	33·7	47	0·491	2·4
Stirling	5,252	42·3	80	0·419	4·7
Annandale and Eskdale	1,331	26·5	76	0·102	2·6
Nithsdale	2,339	29·9	55	0·129	2·4
Stewartry	666	27·8	27	0·018	0·9
Wigtown	687	15·6	95	0·065	1·7
Dunfermline	6,914	34·1	66	0·457	3·3
Kirkcaldy	9,289	39·9	45	0·420	2·4
North East Fife	1,457	20·7	63	0·092	1·6
Aberdeen	6,472	17·2	100	0·646	2·6
Banff and Buchan	3,515	29·4	78	0·274	2·9
Gordon	820	15·0	58	0·047	1·1
Kincardine and Deeside	381	10·9	84	0·032	1·3
Moray	2,128	20·4	23	0·049	0·6
Badenoch and Strathspey	198	18·0	32	0·006	0·7
Caithness	1,037	26·6	36	0·037	1·3
Inverness	2,082	30·9	55	0·115	2·3
Lochaber	405	13·2	157	0·064	2·6
Nairn	261	24·3	23	0·006	0·7
Ross and Cromarty	3,045	49·6	49	0·151	3·2
Skye and Lochalsh	78	9·9	466	0·036	5·3
Sutherland	394	23·2	44	0·017	1·4
East Lothian	4,214	28·5	49	0·206	2·0
Edinburgh	15,946	31·1	65	1·039	3·0
Midlothian	4,936	42·8	50	0·246	3·2
West Lothian	6,400	30·6	25	0·159	1·1
Argyll and Bute	2,786	34·6	39	0·109	1·7
Bearsden and Milngavie	569	32·2	65	0·037	2·8
Clydebank	5,213	45·1	93	0·482	5·3
Clydesdale	2,001	21·0	48	0·095	1·5
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	2,358	55·7	199	0·468	14·3

30 September 1986	column 1	column 2	column 3	column 4	column 5
Cumnock and Doon Valley	3,057	30·9	84	0·256	4·1
Cunninghame	5,500	24·5	35	0·190	1·6
Dumbarton	7,101	56·3	76	0·542	7·0
East Kilbride	441	31·0	77	0·034	3·0
Eastwood	204	11·1	146	0·030	2·6
Glasgow	82,239	49·2	103	8·486	7·8
Hamilton	8,284	36·8	44	0·362	2·4
Inverclyde	4,973	26·7	70	0·350	2·9
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	4,530	26·7	60	0·271	2·5
Kyle and Carrick	4,086	23·8	46	0·187	1·6
Monklands	15,421	54·8	48	0·733	3·6
Motherwell	15,781	40·8	37	0·589	2·4
Renfrew	11,322	30·2	54	0·606	2·7
Strathkelvin	5,206	50·3	71	0·369	4·8
Angus	3,150	24·0	35	0·111	1·2
Dundee	14,824	37·9	62	0·921	3·9
Perth and Kinross	4,566	30·7	24	0·108	1·1
Orkney Islands	680	46·0	59	0·040	3·6
Shetland Islands	1,304	50·2	93	0·121	5·9
Western Isles	1,700	70·2	304	0·517	24·0

30 September 1987	column 1	column 2	column 3	column 4	column 5
Berwickshire	490	19·5	83	0·041	2·0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	865	20·9	34	0·030	1·0
Roxburgh	2,075	37·2	77	0·159	3·2
Tweeddale	282	19·5	35	0·010	1·0
Clackmannan	4,218	47·7	119	0·561	7·5
Falkirk	9,299	30·6	51	0·477	2·2
Stirling	5,100	41·9	91	0·467	4·0
Annandale and Eskdale	1,235	24·9	81	0·100	2·4
Nithsdale	2,483	32·6	51	0·127	2·3
Stewartry	701	29·8	39	0·028	1·4
Wigtown	459	10·5	217	0·099	2·6
Dunfermline	6,865	34·8	67	0·460	3·0
Kirkcaldy	8,058	34·3	57	0·462	2·5
North East Fife	1,449	21·3	47	0·068	1·1
Aberdeen	8.672	23·3	93	0·803	2·8
Banff and Buchan	3,786	32·4	67	0·254	2·7
Gordon	941	17·5	69	0·065	1·5
Kincardine and Deeside	421	12·1	94	0·040	1·5
Moray	2,066	20·2	24	0·049	0·6
Badenoch and Strathspey	203	18·8	63	0·013	1·5
Caithness	983	25·4	38	0·038	1·3
Inverness	2,216	33·1	65	0·143	2·5
Lochaber	363	11·9	119	0·043	1·7
Nairn	267	25·0	28	0·007	0·8
Ross and Cromarty	2,916	47·6	59	0·171	3·4
Skye and Lochalsh	122	15·6	315	0·038	5·5
Sutherland	554	32·4	31	0·017	1·3
East Lothian	4,738	32·6	49	0·231	2·1
Edinburgh	15,586	30·7	74	1·148	2·8
Midlothian	5,686	50·2	43	0·247	3·1
West Lothian	6,640	32·4	25	0·164	1·1
Argyll and Bute	2,576	32·5	29	0·074	1·1
Bearsden and Milngavie	581	32·9	73	0·042	2·8
Clydebank	3,526	31·0	129	0·456	4·5
Clydesdale	2,125	22·6	55	0·117	1·7
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	2,148	51·9	250	0·537	15·2
Cumnock and Doon Valley	3,802	39·0	82	0·312	4·5
Cunninghame	5,680	25·7	45	0·257	1·7
Dumbarton	4,768	38·4	88	0·422	4·4
East Kilbride	559	41·0	58	0·032	2·7
Eastwood	217	12·2	162	0·035	3·0
Glasgow	62,099	37·4	154	9·550	7·6
Hamilton	7,629	34·5	56	0·429	2·5
Inverclyde	4,830	26·9	55	0·265	2·1
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	4,724	28·3	40	0·190	1·6
Kyle and Carrick	4,452	26·6	49	0·220	1·8
Monklands	14,734	53·0	46	0·672	3·0
Motherwell	15,760	41·1	59	0·935	3·3
Renfrew	11,141	30·1	69	0·767	3·1
Strathkelvin	5,362	53·9	135	0·724	9·1
Angus	3,628	28·0	27	0·099	1·0
Dundee	14,807	38·4	75	1·113	4·1
Perth and Kinross	3,788	25·8	29	0·111	1·1
Orkney Islands	629	43·4	81	0·051	4·3
Shetland Islands	796	30·7	116	0·093	4·3
Western Isles	1,695	69·6	260	0·441	19·8

30 September 1988	column 1	column 2	column 3	column 4	column 5
Berwickshire	541	22·0	101	0·055	2·5
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1,087	27·1	37	0·041	1·3
Roxburgh	1,842	34·0	[illegible]	0·101	2·0
Tweeddale	430	29·5	37	0·016	1·5
Clackmannan	4,873	56·8	164	0·801	11·1
Falkirk	6,242	21·2	107	0·668	2·9
Stirling	5,994	50·7	106	0·636	6·4
Annandale and Eskdale	1,260	26·1	97	0·122	2·7
Nithsdale	3,247	44·1	99	0·323	5·5
Stewartry	908	39·4	34	0·031	1·4
Wigtown	1,112	26·1	156	0·173	4·5
Dunfermline	8,354	43·6	80	0·670	4·0
Kirkcaldy	8,821	39·1	79	0·699	3·5
North East Fife	1,913	29·2	62	0·118	1·9
Aberdeen	11,037	29·9	104	1·144	3·7
Banff and Buchan	3,842	33·5	72	0·277	2·7
Gordon	926	17·0	82	0·076	1·7
Kincardine and Deeside	560	15·8	87	0·049	1·8
Moray	2,809	28·0	38	0·106	1·2
Badenoch and Strathspey	260	24·9	69	0·018	1·9
Caithness	1,363	36·1	80	0·110	3·4
Inverness	4,000	60·3	103	0·411	6·7
Lochaber	421	14·5	127	0·053	2·1
Nairn	360	33·7	114	0·041	4·6
Ross and Cromarty	3,760	61·9	71	0·268	4·8
Skye and Lochalsh	152	19·7	180	0·027	3·8
Sutherland	482	28·0	61	0·029	2·1
East Lothian	6,399	46·0	65	0·417	3·5
Edinburgh	22,788	46·1	75	1,709	3·9
Midlothian	4,654	42·8	60	0·280	3·4
West Lothian	8,412	42·1	28	0·239	1·5
Argyll and Bute	3,823	48·7	44	0·168	2·4
Bearsden and Milngavie	725	42·2	174	0·126	7·9
Clydebank	7,047	63·9	223	1·568	14·4

30 September 1988	*column 1*	*column 2*	*column 3*	*column 4*	*column 5*
Clydesdale	2,870	31·1	67	0·191	2·6
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	2,064	51·2	217	0·447	11·9
Cumnock and Doon Valley	4,516	47·7	87	0·391	5·4
Cunninghame	2,665	12·5	114	0·304	1·9
Dumbarton	4,515	37·4	99	0·445	3·9
East Kilbride	531	40·5	75	0·040	3·4
Eastwood	341	19·7	112	0·038	3·1
Glasgow	68,604	42·7	149	10·241	7·1
Hamilton	8,033	37·3	61	0·487	2·8
Inverclyde	6,374	35·5	50	0·318	2·4
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	4,798	29·5	45	0·214	1·7
Kyle and Carrick	6,205	38·8	54	0·333	2·6
Monklands	21,227	77·9	45	0·959	4·0
Motherwell	20,335	55·0	52	1·064	3·7
Renfrew	14,851	40·9	83	1·227	4·7
Strathkelvin	1,871	19·7	246	0·460	5·4
Angus	3,539	27·9	33	0·118	1·2
Dundee	18,500	48·9	55	1·019	3·0
Perth and Kinross	5,649	39·4	33	0·189	1·7
Orkney Islands	647	46·0	89	0·058	4·6
Shetland Islands	843	32·7	133	0·112	4·6
Western Isles	900	37·3	330	0·297	12·5

31 March 1990	*column 1*	*column 2*	*column 3*	*column 4*	*column 5*
Berwickshire	497	21·3	88	0·044	2·0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	680	17·9	67	0·045	1·5
Roxburgh	677	13·2	103	0·070	1·3
Tweeddale	542	39·1	49	0·026	2·6
Clackmannan	2,902	36·0	176	0·512	6·3
Falkirk	8,000	29·4	114	0·911	3·7
Stirling	5,834	52·7	152	0·888	8·2
Annandale and Eskdale	605	13·2	218	0·132	2·8
Nithsdale	2,800	40·9	129	0·362	5·9
Stewartry	964	43·6	48	0·046	2·0
Wigtown	302	7·3	465	0·140	3·5
Dunfermline	7,774	43·7	87	0·678	4·0
Kirkcaldy	7,941	36·3	111	0·880	4·1
North East Fife	1,625	27·3	133	0·216	3·3
Aberdeen	8,557	23·8	195	1·670	4·9
Banff and Buchan	2,993	27·2	62	0·185	1·7
Gordon	674	12·3	88	0·060	1·2
Kincardine and Deeside	504	14·3	111	0·056	2·0
Moray	1,602	16·8	84	0·135	1·4
Badenoch and Strathspey	179	17·8	95	0·017	1·9
Caithness	1,254	33·7	62	0·077	2·2
Inverness	2,017	31·7	211	0·425	6·3
Lochaber	307	11·5	186	0·057	2·1
Nairn	166	15·7	106	0·018	1·6
Ross and Cromarty	2,904	48·8	61	0·177	2·9
Skye and Lochalsh	300	36·9	163	0·049	6·1
Sutherland	229	13·5	54	0·012	0·8
East Lothian	5,911	45·6	107	0·631	5·1
Edinburgh	14,600	32·5	137	1·996	3·9
Midlothian	3,257	32·4	74	0·241	2·9
West Lothian	3,433	18·3	109	0·375	2·2
Argyll and Bute	2,093	27·6	61	0·127	1·7
Bearsden and Milngavie	693	41·8	119	0·082	4·8

31 March 1990	*column 1*	*column 2*	*column 3*	*column 4*	*column 5*
Clydebank	7,815	77·3	93	0·730	5·9
Clydesdale	3,391	39·2	101	0·342	4·3
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	1,707	44·8	173	0·295	7·5
Cumnock and Doon Valley	3,270	36·2	111	0·362	4·7
Cunninghame	7,443	37·4	89	0·661	3·8
Dumbarton	5,115	47·2	125	0·639	5·3
East Kilbride	224	19·0	188	0·042	3·4
Eastwood	203	12·1	158	0·032	2·4
Glasgow	78,568	51·5	147	11·558	6·8
Hamilton	7,250	36·1	90	0·650	3·4
Inverclyde	5,692	32·4	65	0·368	2·4
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	5,057	33·7	62	0·314	2·4
Kyle and Carrick	3,910	25·6	107	0·418	3·0
Monklands	6,435	25·1	142	0·917	3·6
Motherwell	15,047	42·7	84	1·267	4·0
Renfrew	10,150	31·0	187	1·898	6·6
Strathkelvin	1,501	17·0	411	0·617	7·3
Angus	1,394	11·4	72	0·100	1·0
Dundee	15,102	43·4	71	1·079	2·7
Perth and Kinross	3,917	29·2	34	0·132	1·2
Orkney Islands	424	31·4	140	0·060	4·1
Shetland Islands	818	32·2	200	0·164	6·5
Western Isles	837	35·3	343	0·287	11·8

31 March 1991	*column 1*	*column 2*	*column 3*	*column 4*	*column 5*
Berwickshire	546	24·0	83	0·045	2·0
Ettrick and Lauderdale	959	25·9	59	0·057	1·8
Roxburgh	435	8·7	87	0·038	0·7
Tweeddale	428	31·6	56	0·024	2·2
Clackmannan	3,005	39·7	187	0·562	6·4
Falkirk	10,525	40·4	91	0·963	3·7
Stirling	3,800	35·7	267	1·016	8·8
Annandale and Eskdale	1,120	24·9	105	0·118	2·3
Nithsdale	2,148	32·2	161	0·345	5·2
Stewartry	788	36·0	68	0·054	2·3
Wigtown	675	16·8	250	0·169	4·2
Dunfermline	6,621	39·0	94	0·622	3·5
Kirkcaldy	8·463	39·3	95	0·806	3·6
North East Fife	1,571	27·1	99	0·155	2·4
Aberdeen	8,941	25·4	165	1,472	4·1
Banff and Buchan	4,517	42·0	64	0·287	2·5
Gordon	573	10·6	130	0·074	1·4
Kincardine and Deeside	646	18·3	95	0·061	2·0
Moray	1,601	17·2	68	0·108	1·1
Badenoch and Strathspey	215	21·7	124	0·027	3·2
Caithness	1,573	42·7	54	0·084	2·2
Inverness	1,881	30·2	71	0·133	1·9
Lochaber	381	14·8	195	0·074	2·6
Nairn	147	14·0	94	0·014	1·3
Ross and Cromarty	2,832	48·2	60	0·170	2·6
Skye and Lochalsh	151	18·3	150	0·023	2·5
Sutherland	236	13·7	63	0·015	0·8
East Lothian	5,451	43·6	123	0·668	5·1
Edinburgh	14,225	33·7	173	2·465	4·4
Midlothian	4,149	43·1	59	0·245	3·0
West Lothian	3,400	18·9	139	0·471	2·8
Argyll and Bute	2,595	35·1	58	0·151	1·8

31 March 1991	*column 1*	*column 2*	*column 3*	*column 4*	*column 5*
Bearsden and Milngavie	603	37·6	139	0·084	4·5
Clydebank	4,986	52·8	164	0·816	6·3
Clydesdale	2,550	30·3	143	0·365	4·4
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	2,132	57·0	169	0·339	9·0
Cumnock and Doon Valley	3,659	41·3	107	0·391	4·8
Cunninghame	6,547	34·0	84	0·550	2·9
Dumbarton	5,488	52·2	109	0·600	4·5
East Kilbride	1,122	100·3	46	0·052	4·0
Eastwood	237	14·3	138	0·033	2·3
Glasgow	80,687	54·9	154	12·434	6·7
Hamilton	7,150	37·3	100	0·718	3·7
Inverclyde	5,739	33·4	137	0·787	4·5
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	3,484	24·1	77	0·270	2·0
Kyle and Carrick	4,001	27·9	131	0·523	3·7
Monklands	6,443	26·1	143	0·919	3·5
Motherwell	15,524	45·2	66	1·021	3·0
Renfrew	10,435	32·5	212	2·210	7·0
Strathkelvin	2,838	33·2	238	0·675	7·6
Angus	1,373	11·5	78	0·107	1·0
Dundee	12,831	39·5	97	1·247	2·8
Perth and Kinross	3,611	28·0	45	0·161	1·3
Orkney Islands	389	29·5	170	0·066	4·2
Shetland Islands	887	34·9	196	0·174	6·5
Western Isles	1,281	54·2	288	0·368	13·7

Condensation and Dampness

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money his Department is making available to local housing authorities in Scotland to deal specifically with problems of condensation and dampness in council housing stock; what is his assessment of the extent of this problem in Scotland; and the prospects for achieving a solution.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* The gross provisional housing capital allocations to local authorities for 1992-93 total £412 million for expenditure on the housing revenue account block for investment in authorities' own housing stock. Local authorities have estimated that at 31 March 1991 about 259,000 local authority houses were affected by condensation and damp. It is for local authorities to decide how best to deploy the substantial resources available to them to meet local housing needs, including the need to tackle condensation and dampness.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy towards support for small independent electricity generators who use renewable energy sources; and whether he intends to take any further steps to ensure that electricity distribution companies increase their use of renewable energy.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* The hon. Member is referring to the parliamentary answer given to the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) on 15 May 1991 at column *208-9.* These arrangements have enabled a number of new small hydro projects to be brought forward for development.

Moreover, as I told the Parliamentary Select Committee on Energy on 29 January, the Secretary of State is now putting in hand discussions with a view to implementing a Scottish renewables obligation (SRO) requiring Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro-Electric to increase the amount of electricity they purchase from renewable sources. The form and size of the order have yet to be determined, but the intention is to make a series of orders over a period of years. Any SRO will have clearly defined objectives which will take fully into account the Scottish context within which it will operate.

Armed Assaults

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each police force in Scotland the number of armed assaults for each year since 1980.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* Information on assaults involving weapons other than firearms is not collected centrally. The number of assaults in which a firearm was alleged to have been used by police force area is given in the following table.

Scotland, 1980 to 1990

Police Force	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Northern	1	3	6	7	12	7	5	10	1	7	9
Grampian	21	13	13	20	10	24	22	16	7	4	15
Tayside	7	19	18	15	11	14	14	17	3	4	10
Fife	0	0	0	0	2	10	10	7	6	1	4
Lothian and Borders	45	44	38	44	46	109	86	65	32	44	66
Central	3	6	5	4	2	6	6	7	6	4	10
Strathclyde	204	241	200	262	228	265	239	243	224	154	213
Dumfries and Galloway	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
SCOTLAND	282	328	281	352	311	436	382	365	280	219	327

Notes:

1. Assaults include the categories homicide, attempted murder, serious assault, sexual assault and petty assault.
2. Firearms include imitation firearms and crossbows.

Imitation Firearms

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the latest figures he has on the number of armed robberies in which imitation guns were used.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* This information is contained in table 4 of the Scottish Office statistical bulletin CRJ/1991/2 "Recorded Crimes and Offences Involving Firearms, Scotland 1990", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to curb the sale of imitation guns; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* The firearms consultative committee has recently considered this matter and has put recommendations to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. These recommendations include extending the range of offences relating to the misuse of firearms and ensuring that in future the packaging of such weapons carries a warning about offences and penalties relating to their use. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is looking afresh at the law regarding replicas in the light of the recommendations put to him by the committee.

Punt-Gunning

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many black powder licences were issued in each of the last three years for the purpose of punt-gunning.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* This information is not available; punt-gunning is not common in Scotland.

Road Construction

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average cost of building a mile of *(a)* dual carriageway and *(b)* motorway at current prices; and what moneys he has allocated to current (i) dual carriageway and (ii) motorway construction in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* The average total estimated cost per mile of schemes currently under construction or completed in the last six years at 1991-92 prices is detailed, by category, together with the relevant predicted expenditure in 1991-92. It should be noted that cost of building can vary widely depending on the nature of the terrain through which a road passes, bridgeworks and other structures required etc.

Classification	*£ million* *Average cost per mile*	*1991-92 predicted expenditure*
Dual carriageway	3·3	1·5
Dual 2 lane motorway (rural)	7·0	7·3
Dual 3 lane motorway (rural)	8·0	49·3

AIDS

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many non-haemophiliacs in Scotland who have contracted HIV as a result of national health service blood/tissue transfers *(a)*, remain alive, *(b)* have developed AIDS and remain alive and *(c)* have developed AIDS and have died.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* There have been 12 reported cases of HIV infected persons in Scotland as a result of blood or tissue transfers from NHS sources. Of these 12, six have progressed to AIDS and three of these have died.

Foresterhill Hospital

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under what authority the chairman of Foresterhill hospital NHS trust may intervene in the management of the hospital laundry on the Foresterhill site prior to 1 April.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* The Foresterhill NHS trust was established in January and becomes operational on 1 April. Whilst the trust board has no current day-to-day responsibility for the running of the hospitals it clearly makes sense for there to be close liaison between Grampian health board and the trust board on issues which are likely to have a bearing on matters which will affect the trust after April.

Health Boards (Financing)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial allocations he has made to health boards for 1992-93.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has allocated £2,709·2 million to health boards to meet their expenditure commitment on hospital and community health services in 1992-93. The figure includes £2,480·5 million to meet gross recurrent expenditure commitments —£2,451·6 million net—and £228·7 million to meet gross capital expenditure commitments. In addition the Common Services Agency has been allocated £135·9 million.

The allocation taken with health boards' own cash-releasing efficiency savings gives an increase in available resources of 10·04 per cent. and 10·06 per cent. for the Common Services Agency. It amounts to an extra £230·4 million for health boards in Scotland.

The revenue resources have been made available to health boards as purchasers of services and they will negotiate contracts with provider units for the services which their resident population needs.

The gross capital amount available to boards and trusts represents a 7·27 per cent. increase over 1991-92. Within this amount capital allocations to health boards will continue the high level of investment in recent years in health building projects and the existing estate. Every board will have the resources to begin at least one new building project in some cases many more. Substantial investment will be made in major hospital projects now under construction including the Royal Cornhill hospital in Grampian, the Perth royal infirmary, Tayside, the

Western Isles hospital in Stornoway, the West Fife district general hospital phase 2 in Dunfermline, the spinal injuries unit at the Southern general hospital, Glasgow and Udston hospital in Lanarkshire. It will also provide the resources to progress new hospital developments at Oban, Campbeltown, Elgin, Peterhead and Crieff, a new maternity unit for Glasgow, a new acute hospital for South Lanarkshire, the redevelopment for Hairmyres hospital in Lanarkshire, the acquisition of a site for the new teaching hospital in Edinburgh, mental health developments in Inverness and for improvements to GP surgeries in the highlands and islands. The allocations also include resources for computer development.

Details of individual board allocations are contained in the table.

Health Board Allocations: 1992-93

Health Board	*HCH Revenue Allocation £000s*	*HCH Capital Allocation £000s*
Argyll and Clyde	193,176	17,369
Ayrshire and Arran	152,000	8,808
Borders	48,651	2,138
Dumfries and Galloway	69,534	3,141
Fife	143,602	26,946
Forth Valley	112,385	11,349
Grampian	222,328	19,972
Greater Glasgow	496,421	41,155
Highland	93,606	11,161
Lanarkshire	213,007	15,388
Lothian	356,675	20,039
Orkney	9,941	1,415
Shetland	11,292	1,847
Tayside	211,155	15,905
Western Isles	17,620	7,210
Scotland	2,351,393	203,843
Common Services Agency	[1]£135,900	

[1] Revenue and Capital

A further £136·87 million revenue and £24·857 million capital will be distributed during the year for cardiac surgery, medical and clinical audit, breast cancer screening, bridging finance and other specific initiatives. External financing limits for trusts will be announced in early February.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 February 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

House Repossessions

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the number of court orders for house repossession in the area covering the Crewe and Nantwich constituency for the years 1979-80, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

The Attorney-General: The Crewe and Nantwich constituency is covered by Crewe county court. The figures for the number of orders made on mortgage possession actions for the year 1979-80 are not available. The table shows the number of actions entered and orders made in Crewe county court for the years 1990-91 and the first three quarters of 1991-92. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all the orders made will have resulted in the execution of warrants of possession. At this stage the 1991-92 figures are provisional and therefore liable to revision in the future.

Mortgage possession actions at Crewe county court

	Actions entered	*Orders made*
April 1990 to March 1991	290	175
January 1991 to December 1991	325	206

Mr. Allen: To ask the Attorney-General how many mortgage repossession orders have been granted by the courts covering the city of Nottingham in each year since 1978.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) on 6 February 1992 at column *248*.

Derek Bentley

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Attorney-General what action the Lord Chancellor has taken in respect of papers relating to the case of Derek Bentley; and if he will make a statement on his policy regarding making the papers available to the public.

The Attorney-General: The Metropolitan police file on the Bentley case held by the Public Record Office is closed for 75 years under a Lord Chancellor's instrument, made under section 5(1) of the Public Records Act 1958. Two excerpts from the Home Office file are likewise closed for 75 years; the file as a whole will not be 30 years old until 1996. The court file is awaiting transfer to the Public Record Office and will be open to inspection on transfer. Questions of access to records which are subject to extended closure under the Public Records Act, or which are not yet 30 years old, are the responsibility of the originating department.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Correspondence

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington can expect a response from the Minister for Roads and Traffic to his letter of 29 September 1991, requesting a reply to the deputation he received from Shrewley parish council.

Mr. Chope: I have written to my hon. Friend.

Driving Tests, Portsmouth

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average waiting time for a driving test in Portsmouth.

Mr. Chope: I am asking the chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency to write to my hon. Friend direct.

Drivers (Eyesight)

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are being taken to ensure that motorists meet the Department's eyesight requirements.

Mr. Chope: All drivers are required to pass the statutory number plate eyesight test at the start of their driving test. They are required to meet this standard at all times when driving. Drivers aged 70 or over are required to renew their driving licences at regular intervals, and at each renewal to certify that they meet the eyesight standard. The police have powers to stop and test drivers whom they believe have defective eyesight. There are about 300 prosecutions for eyesight offences each year.

Roads (Leicester)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated total cost of (i) the A46/A47 link road and (ii) the Leicester eastern district distributor road.

Mr. Chope: Both these schemes are the responsibility of the local highway authority, Leicestershire county council.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received a copy of the kenwood proposals for the Leicester eastern bypass; and if he will instruct the Department's consultants to discuss the kenwood proposals with interested parties.

Mr. Chope: Proposals for an eastern bypass of Leicester were received from a Mr. Henwood in 1987. We have no plans to discuss them with other parties.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he first received representations regarding the Leicester eastern bypass; what are the expected dates for *(a)* the start and *(b)* completion of the Leicester eastern bypass; and what is the total estimated cost of the Leicester eastern bypass.

Mr. Chope: The first correspondence about Leicester eastern bypass following the inclusion of the scheme in the national roads programme was received in summer 1989. Subject to the identification of a viable scheme, the availability of funds and the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures, work could start around the turn of the century and would take about two years to complete. The estimated cost of the scheme is £45 million.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions *(a)* officials and *(b)* Ministers from his Department visited Leicester to acquaint themselves with the environmental problems associated with roads in the city.

Mr. Chope: It is not possible, without incurring disproportionate costs, to determine how many officials have visited Leicester to examine traffic-related environmental problems although officials do visit the city on a regular basis. I chaired the East Midlands regional annual consultative committee in Leicester on 17 December last year.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission an independent survey of the traffic flows of eastern Leicester, relating to both the eastern distributor road and the Leicester eastern bypass.

Mr. Chope: The Department is already assessing traffic flows in connection with its Leicester eastern bypass scheme. This assessment will take account of the effect of other road proposals in the area.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Leicester western bypass was first proposed; in which years consultation and design took place; and what was the estimated cost of the bypass.

Mr. Chope: The Leicester western bypass was added to the national roads programme in 1976. Public consultation took place in 1978 and 1979. Design of the scheme has been a continuous process up to the invitation of construction tenders last month. The scheme is currently estimated to cost £87 million.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the present traffic flow on the distributor road network in Leicester.

Mr. Chope: The distributor road network in Leicester is the responsibility of the local highway authority, Leicestershire county council.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department has only three data systems with external links or commitments to supply information to which data protection provisions also apply. They are:

the register of drivers and vehicles maintained by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, from which information is currently supplied to the police for law enforcement in accordance with existing registrations under the Data Protection Act 1984;

the traffic commissioners record of licensed goods operators, to which the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, the Vehicle Inspectorate Agency and the Customs and Excise drugs intelligence unit have access for law enforcement and road safety purposes in accordance with existing registrations under the Data Protection Act 1984;

the record of licensed public service vehicle operators currently under development which will operate under identical data protection registrations as that for goods vehicle operators.

In addition the traffic commissioners have access to the vehicle inspectorate's roadworthiness and enforcement database for road safety and law enforcement purposes.

The Department periodically reviews both the scope of and the means by which protected data is transferred to other agencies. The purpose for any external data request is considered carefully and the Data Protection Registrar would be consulted before any change in registration purposes implemented.

DVLC (Vehicle Registrations)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* heavy goods vehicles and *(b)* vehicles in total were registered with the DVLC in each year since 1980; how many (i) motor cars and (ii) heavy goods vehicles are currently registered for addresses in the east midlands region; and what is his estimate for the total number of (1) motor cars and (2) heavy goods vehicles in Great Britain.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is as follows:

Thousands

Year	*Heavy Goods Vehicles*	*Total Vehicles*
1980	475	19,200
1981	451	19,347
1982	436	19,762
1983	436	20,209
1984	437	20,765
1985	432	21,157
1986	435	21,699
1987	444	22,152
1988	462	23,202
1989	478	24,196
1990	460	24,673

East Midlands Region: 1990

Thousands

Motor Cars	*Heavy Goods Vehicles*
1,403	37

It is forecast that the number of vehicles of body type car in Great Britain in 2000 will be in the range of 24 to 26 million.

My Department does not forecast the number of heavy goods vehicles, but it forecasts that HGV traffic in 2000 will be 15 to 27 per cent. higher than in 1990.

Seat Belts

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column 632, what steps he has taken to obtain the agreement of the European Community to compulsory three point belts for rear centre seating on all saloon motor vehicles.

Mr. Chope: Negotiations are still continuing in the European Community on dates for the fitment of these point belts for rear outer seats in new cars. Requiring three point belts in rear centre seats would be technically complex, would take time to develop and, would be unlikely to secure agreement. The quickest and most effective way forward is for manufacturers voluntarily to introduce three point belts for rear centre seats wherever technically possible.

Transport Supplementary Credit Approvals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the amount of transport supplementary credit approvals *(a)* applied for and *(b)* granted to Leicestershire county council in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Chope: Supplementary credit approvals were first introduced in the 1990-91 transport supplementary grant settlement. The figures are:

	Bid £ million	*Granted £ million*
1990-91	0	0·081
1991-92	0	0·944
1992-93	1·163	1·312

Travers Morgan

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the contracts let by his Department to Travers Morgan since 1979.

Mr. Chope: This information is available only at disproportionate cost.

New Roads

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the considerations taken into account when proposing new roads.

Mr. Chope: The Government's objectives, as set out in the 1989 White Paper "Roads for Prosperity" are:

to assist economic growth by reducing transport costs;
to improve the environment by removing through traffic from unsuitable roads in towns and villages;
to enhance road safety.

Taxi Drivers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what appeal procedure is available to a taxi driver who is considered not to be a fit and proper person to hold a taxi licence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Any person who is aggrieved at the decision of a licensing authority to refuse, suspend or revoke a hackney carriage (taxi) driver licence for any reason has a right of appeal as follows:

In London

The appeal should be made under section 17 of the Transport Act 1985 to either the licensing authority (the Assistant Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis) for reconsideration; or to a magistrates' court.

An unsuccessful appeal to the assistant commissioner does not preclude an appeal to a Magistrates' court.

Outside London

In the case of councils who license under Part II of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 the appeal should be made to the magistrates court under section 59 of that Act.

For councils who have not adopted the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 and only license under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847, appeals should be made to the crown Court under Section 7(1)(a) of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1890.

Any appeal to a court must be within 21 days of the licensing authority's decision.

As far as I am aware in general this system works satisfactorily.

London Taxis (Wheelchairs)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he is giving to ending the requirements that each new London taxi is accessible to wheelchair users and that by 2000 all London taxis will be accessible.

Mr. Freeman: None.

The requirement of wheelchair access to London taxis was introduced at the instigation of the Department of Transport after extensive research. The availability of such taxis is already making a major contribution to the independent mobility of large numbers of disabled people.

A6

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is his intention that the A6 should become a strategic alternative to the M1 motorway.

Mr. Chope: The A6 is already a strategic route within the national network of trunk roads.

Speed Limits

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce speed limits of 20 mph in areas immediately adjacent to schools.

Mr. Chope: The Road Traffic Act 1991 makes provision for variable speed limits. My Department will be mounting trials involving the setting of 20 mph speed limits outside schools at the times when children are arriving or leaving. These trials will provide a basis for guidance to local authorities on the establishment of such limits.

Grant Projects

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will list the projects receiving transport support grant in Darlington since 1979, together with the amounts concerned.

Mr. Chope: Since 1979 three schemes have received transport supplementary grant in Darlington district. They are:

	£ million
A6072 Heighington Bypass	1·8
A67 Teesside Link and Airport Access	6·3
A68 Darlington Cross Town Route Stage 1	5·7

The Heighington bypass was completed in 1983 and the Teesside link is now under construction.

Bus Use (London)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress on the allocation of resources for measures to promote bus use in London.

Mr. Freeman: I am pleased to announce the allocation of £500,000 of supplementary credit approvals in 1992-93 for bus priority measures in the boroughs of Haringey, Newham, Camden and Ealing. Table 1 sets out the detailed allocations. Further resources are being held for possible allocation to other schemes in south and west London and Tower Hamlets when details have been considered in respect of firm proposals.

Table 1
Local authority supplementary credit approvals for bus priority measures in London 1992-93

London boroughs	*£'000*
Haringey	100
Newham	200
Camden	100
Ealing	100

Rail Electrification

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the percentage of their mainline railway networks which have been electrified for each country in the EC.

Mr. Freeman: UIC figures for the percentage of the mainline railway network electrified for each country are as follows:

	Per cent.
Belgium (SNCB)	65
Denmark (DSB)	10
France (SNCF)	36
Germany (DR/DB)	38
Great Britain (BR)	27
Greece (CH)	0
Holland (NS)	69
Italy (FS)	59
Luxembourg (CFL)	72
Portugal (CP)	15
Republic of Ireland (CIE)	2
Spain (RENFE)	51

Source:—UIC International Railway Statistics 1989.

Norsea

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the prototype launching gear involved in the accident on the Norsea; when this launching gear was fitted; whether similar launching gear is fitted on any other vessel; and when the marine accident investigations branch inquiry will be completed.

Mr. McLoughlin: These matters will be addressed during the investigation being carried out by the marine accident investigation branch. It is far too early to say when the comprehensive investigation into this accident will be completed.

Severn Tunnel

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many railway workers have been arrested in connection with the recent Severn tunnel railway accident; if he will place in the Library a copy of the evidence submitted to the British Rail inquiry; and what guidelines he has issued to the British transport police on co-operation with internal British Rail inquiries.

Mr. Freeman: The British Transport police (BTP) have informed me that they arrested three British Rail staff in connection with their inquiries into the Severn tunnel train accident. No charges have been made and the staff have been released on bail pending enquiries.

Publication of evidence to an internal British Rail inquiry is a matter for BR.

We are not aware of any lack of co-operation between the BTP and BR in their respective investigations into this incident. BTP are keeping HM railway inspectorate fully informed.

Life-saving Equipment

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will outline the procedures which govern the testing of prototype life-saving equipment on *(a)* operational ferries and *(b)* other vessels.

Mr. McLoughlin: The procedures for testing the life-saving equipment on all merchant ships are prescribed in the Merchant Shipping (Life-Saving Appliances) Regulations 1986, as amended, and described in detail in the Department's publication, "Survey of Life-Saving Appliances; volume 2". Prototype, modified and production appliances are subject to the appropriate strength and operational tests to ensure that they are safe and will be effective in service.

Rail Electrification

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has met representatives of Tayside and Grampian regional councils to discuss the financing of the electrification of the main east coast line between Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen; if he plans to do so in the future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Ministers have not met representatives from Tayside and Grampian regional councils to discuss the electrification of the Edinburgh to Aberdeen line. The councils should approach British Rail, as it is for BR to bring forward proposals if it considers there is a case for electrification and that it merits sufficient priority within its investment programme.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total mileage of the United Kingdom's mainline railway network; how many of these miles have been electrified to date; and how many miles are currently programmed to be electrified.

Mr. Freeman: InterCity mainline services currently operate over 3,328 route miles of which 1,1[illegible] route miles are electrified. InterCity has not put forw[illegible] any further plans for mainline electrification.

Fire Engines

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what income has been raised through road fund licences on vintage and private fire engines since exemption from such tax was removed.

Mr. Chope: The information requested on the amount of duty collected from previously exempt fire engines is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

There are however approximately 1,300 such vehicles identified prior to the change. If all of these relicenced for the full year in the private and light goods (PLG) taxation class, the revenue raised would amount to £130,000.

Cargo Straps

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what proposals he has to introduce regulatory control of cargo straps used by road haulage vehicles;

(2) how many road accidents each year are attributable to failures of road haulage cargo straps.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer Friday 7 February 1992]*: There are no national statistics which identify the role of insecure loads in accidents. A recent study, however, estimated that nationally fewer than 30 fatal accidents each year involve insecure loads. It is uncertain how many of these involve cargo strap failure. The most important factor in reducing insecure load accidents is the configuration and type of restraint systems. A revised code of practice dealing with this is to be issued for consultation shortly.

Vehicle Movements (Greater London)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has of the likely number of daily vehicle movements in Greater London for the current year, 1995, 1997 and 2000; and what are the comparable figures for 1990, 1987 and 1980.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer Monday 10 February 1992]*: My Department does not have either forecasts or past estimates available in the form requested. Surveys indicate an overall traffic growth rate for Greater London of about 1 per cent. per year through the 1980s. Traffic growth was lower in inner London than in the outer areas. Traffic forecasts for London alone are not available.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Personal Information

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to allow a parent or student to consent to, or be aware of, those uses and disclosures of personal information not obvious at the time the parent or student provides the information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Guidance to schools on the implications of the Data Protection Act, issued last November, includes information on the data protection principles.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what is the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The Department's information systems are concerned wholly with the administration of the Department's business. It has no systems where information is made generally available which is not otherwise publicly available. Where appropriate such systems are registered under the Data Protection Act.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those full inspections which have taken place in relation to grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Eggar: To date there have been no full inspections of grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what criteria he intends to use for the publication of inspection reports on grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Eggar: In all cases where an inspection is planned by Her Majesty's inspectorate to lead to a published report, my right hon. and learned Friend has published the reports. The same principle will be applied to any reports on grant-maintained schools.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in North Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1978 and May 1980.

Mr. Eggar: Most Government support for expenditure on education in North Yorkshire is paid to North Yorkshire county council as unhypothecated revenue support grant. In 1991-92, the Department is making available specific grant to North Yorkshire local education authority of some £3,168,000 through its programme of grants for education support and training, to support expenditure on implementing the national curriculum, local management of schools and a number of other national priorities; and of some £83,000 to support the education of children of travellers, refugees and other displaced persons. There were no similar specific grants between 1978 and 1980. The Department also pays grant to North Yorkshire local education authority to cover the cost of mandatory awards to students undertaking higher education. The Department additionally pays grant to the University Funding Council and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council, which support higher education in North Yorkshire.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Department utilises a wide range of information technology systems to provide support in the conduct of its business. A number of these use information from external sources, both within the United Kingdom and in Europe. This information is often commercially available, and increasingly it is available electronically. Furthermore, the Department uses IT systems to provide modern communication facilities such as electronic mail.

Although much of the Departmental information is not of a personal nature and therefore not subject to the Data Protection Act, in those instances where personal information forms any part of an IT system its use is registered as required under the Data Protection Act. Registration information is available from the Data Protection Registrar. The Department's central personnel system is computerised, and data are exchanged between this system and the HM Treasury pay system at Chessington.

Data Protection (European Directive)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many meetings he has had with representatives from organisations about the contents of the proposed European directives on data protection and in relation to data protection and communications; how many meetings were with organisations representing the interests of the data users or the telecommunications industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The responsibility for these directives falls mainly to the Home Office, although the Department of Trade and Industry lead on the directive on data protection in telecommunications and the decision on information security. There have been no meetings with DTI Ministers specifically on this issue, but regular representations have been received at official level.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what effect his Department estimates a general agreement on tariffs and trade settlement will have upon clothing and textile employment in the respective regions of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 1 July 1991 to a question from the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), at column 20. Professor Silberston did not attempt a regional breakdown of the effect on employment of ending the multi-fibre arrangement, although he did give detailed consideration to those factors, such as regional levels of employment opportunities, which appeared to be relevant. A successful outcome to the GATT Uruguay round would include strengthened rules and disciplines and increased multilateral market access: this, taken together with the 10-year transitional period for phasing out textile restraints, should mitigate the impact on employment in the industry.

Beer Complaints

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints he has received from members of the public in Scotland concerning froth on beer.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 10 February 1992]*: None of the recent complaints I have received has come from members of the public in Scotland. However, surveys by trading standards departments in Scotland have shown many instances in which licensees served less than a full measure of liquid beer.

Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress with his Department's review of the operation of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985.

Mr. Redwood: The issues arising from the review of the operation of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 are being carefully considered. If any changes are considered to be appropriate, the Government will consult with interested parties.

ENERGY

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in North Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department does not keep information in a suitable form to carry out the required analysis.

Nuclear Safeguards

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to the oral answer of 4 February by the Minister for Defence Procurement, *Official Report*, column 119, how much extra funding Her Majesty's Government will make available for nuclear safeguards inspection under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty provisions.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Negotiations on safeguards agreements between the International Atomic Energy Agency and the former republics of the Soviet Union have not yet begun, and provision for safeguards has not been made in the agency's budget. IAEA activities in Iraq are funded by the special commission. The needs of the safeguards system will naturally occupy a central part of the discussions on the agency's budget.

THE ARTS

Data Protection Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister for the Arts what data information systems his office has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Office of Arts and Libraries has no major data information system of its own; it has access to the system of the Cabinet Office/Office of the Minister for the Civil Service, with which it is closely associated. It also has a number of stand-alone personal computers to help meet the functions of the Department. My office has not been consulted with a view to taking part in any other data information systems.

There is no current or planned link to the police national computer. An electronic mail link is being planned by the Cabinet Office to operate between each of its major networks and to other Government Departments.

The 1984 Data Protection Act applies, and registrations have been made where appropriate.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Walden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of mortgage tax relief in 1991.

Mr. Maude: Tax relief is calculated for the fiscal year. Provisional estimates of the cost of mortgage interest tax relief for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are £7·7 billion and £6·1 billion respectively.

VAT (Bloodstock)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement concerning representations to the European Commission on the Irish VAT rate for bloodstock.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The European Commission, on its own initiative, is currently examining the present practices in Ireland in relation to VAT and bloodstock.

Tax Allowances and Reliefs

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1992-93, and in a full year, of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of *(a)* £9,000, *(b)* £10,000, *(c)* £11,000, *(d)* £12,000, *(e)* £13,000, *(f)* £14,000, *(g)* £15,000 and *(h)* £16,000 giving the number of people affected in each case, distinguishing between (i) basic-rate taxpayers and (ii) higher-rate taxpayers, and giving the number who brought into higher rate tax in each case, in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that at 1991-92 levels of income the introduction of the upper limits specified would yield the following:

Upper limit for total allowances and reliefs £	*Yield in full year* £ *million*
9,000	930
10,000	590
11,000	440
12,000	360
13,000	310
14,000	270
15,000	240
16,000	210

The number of people who would be affected are as follows:

Upper limit for total allowances and reliefs £	*Basic rate taxpayers and non taxpayers* *(000's)*	*Higher rate taxpayers* *(000's)*
9,000	1,090	555
10,000	250	385
11,000	55	215
12,000	30	135
13,000	20	100
14,000	15	75
15,000	10	65
16,000	10	55

Fewer than 5,000 basic rate taxpayers would become higher rate taxpayers.

The effect on receipts in the first year would depend on the administrative arrangements for applying a limit.

It is not possible to provide detailed estimates for 1992-93.

The estimates do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such a limit.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the average tax allowances and reliefs for those with gross incomes *(a)* under £10,000, *(b)* between £10,000 and £20,000, *(c)* between £20,000 and £30,000, *(d)* between £30,000 and £40,000, *(e)* between £40,000 and £50,000, *(f)* between £50,000 and £60,000, *(g)* between £60,000 and £70,000, *(h)* between £70,000 and £80,000 and (i) above £80,000.

Mr. Maude: Latest estimates for taxpayers in 1991-92 are as follows:

Gross income £ per year	*Amount of tax reliefs and allowances set against income* £
0-10,000	4,200
10,000-20,000	5,900
20,000-30,000	7,000
30,000-40,000	7,800
40,000-50,000	8,400
50,000-60,000	8,900
60,000-70,000	9,500
70,000-80,000	9,900
Over 80,000	13,300
Average	5,500

Taxation

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people with gross incomes of over £100,000 pay an income tax bill of less than *(a)* 35 per cent., *(b)* 30 per cent., *(c)* 25 per cent., *(d)* 20 per cent., *(e)* 15 per cent., *(f)* 10 per cent. and *(g)* 5 per cent. of their gross incomes;

(2) how many higher-rate taxpayers pay an income tax bill of less than *(a)* 35 per cent., *(b)* 30 per cent., *(c)* 25 per cent., *(d)* 20 per cent., *(e)* 15 per cent., *(f)* 10 per cent. and *(g)* 5 per cent. of their gross incomes.

Mr. Maude: Available information for 1991-92 is as follows:

Estimated number of taxpayers (thousands)

Income tax liability as a percentage of gross income[1]	*Gross income over £80,000*	*Higher rate taxpayers*
Less than 35 per cent.	110	1,590
Less than 30 per cent.	20	1,420
Less than 25 per cent.	—	1,000
Less than 20 per cent.	—	300
Less than 15 per cent.	—	—
Less than 10 per cent.	—	—
Less than 5 per cent.	—	—

[1] Total income for income tax purposes.

I regret that a reliable analysis of taxpayers with incomes over £100,000 is not available.

ENVIRONMENT

Air Quality

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has of breathing air quality levels falling below European Community safety standards; in what respect, what areas and for what duration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Information on the concentrations of various air pollutants is collected by monitoring networks operated on behalf of my Department. The European Community has set air quality standards in Directives covering smoke and sulphur dioxide, lead, and nitrogen dioxide. Since 1988-89, there have been only the following exceedences of the Directives' limit values:

1989

Lead limit value exceeded in Walsall (21 weeks over the annual mean concentration limit value);

1989-90

Smoke/sulphur dioxide limit values exceeded at two sites in Belfast (i) 15 days (sulphur dioxide and (ii) eight days (sulphur dioxide) and six days (smoke); at Newry and Mourne, 17 days (smoke); and at Sunderland, 12 days (smoke);

Nitrogen dioxide directive breached in west London (27 more hours over the hourly average concentration than allowed by the directive (175));

1990-91

Smoke/sulphur dioxide limit values exceeded at three sites in Belfast, (i) eight days (smoke), (ii) seven days (smoke) and (iii) 12 days (sulphur dioxide) and nine days (smoke).

The breach in west London was merely a technical breach caused by local vehicle emissions from an indoor source adjacent to the monitoring probe. The measured air quality was therefore not representative of human exposure in the area.

Leigh Barton

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many years Leigh Barton, near Churstow, has been closed to the public; and when it is planned to be reopened.

Mr. Yeo: Opening Leigh Barton to the general public has not yet proved possible due to the extensive repair work which was necessary following its acquisition. However, interested groups have been allowed supervised visits since 1986. English Heritage is currently looking at the possibility of a beneficial use which would contribute to completion of the repair work and be compatible with some future public access.

Orimulsion

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment from whom the hon. Member for Dover is to receive a reply to letters sent to his Department and to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution during the current session regarding work done by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in connection with Orimulsion.

Mr. Baldry: I have replied to three letters in the current session in connection with Orimulsion. These were sent to my hon. Friend on 18 November 1991, 16 December 1991 and 3 February 1992.

Ozone-depleting Chemicals

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those applications for which Her Majesty's Government considers chlorofluorocarbons are still needed and where substitutes are not yet available; when it is expected that each such CFC-producing application can be phased out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: CFCs are still needed for some refrigeration, air conditioning and solvent applications, and for certain foams and medical aerosol products. The Government have proposed a 1996 phase-out for supply of new CFCs, except for any essential uses for which the Montreal protocol parties agree that alternatives are not available at that time.

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek an emergency meeting of the Montreal protocol so that an immediate ban on all ozone-depleting chemicals can be introduced.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ask for an emergency meeting of the Montreal protocol to discuss the recent data on the Arctic and northern hemisphere ozone hole; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on ozone-depleting substances.

Mr. Trippier: The Montreal protocol parties are already due to meet in November this year and will consider whether the controls on ozone-depleting substances should be tightened. Official level negotiations begin on 6 April. I proposed to the EC Environment Council last December that the protocol's phase-out dates be brought forward to 1995 for halons and 1996 for other ozone-depleting substances, an acceleration ranging from four to nine years. As far as I am aware, the United Kingdom is so far the only country to have made firm proposals to strengthen the protocol. An immediate CFC phase-out is not practicable—for many applications, such as food preservation, insulating foam and medical aerosols, replacement technologies are not yet adequately developed.

Community Charge (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost involved in issuing the 145,000 summonses served by Liverpool city council in the cases of alleged community charge non-payers; and what redress is open to recipients who have paid their community charge.

Mr. Key: My Department does not collect information on the costs incurred by local authorities in taking enforcement action against non-payers of the community charge. Following the issue of a summons, the magistrates court may grant the local authority a liability order against an individual only if it is satisfied that his community charge is payable and remains unpaid.

Leeds Development Corporation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the number of jobs in the area covered by Leeds development corporation at its inception, and on the latest available figures.

Mr. Key: The number of jobs in the area covered by the Leeds development corporation is updated annually with effect from 1 April by the development corporation. As my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities said in his reply of 18 October 1991 at column 283, a total of 31,871 people were employed in the Leeds development corporation's area at the time of inception. The latest available figure is 37,733 as at March 1991.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Leeds development corporation expects to publish planning proposals for the East street area of Leeds 9; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Proposals for the north side of East street are contained in the Marsh lane/Saxton lane and the Low Fold planning frameworks which were published by Leeds development corporation in February 1990, following a period of public consultation. Proposals for the south side of East street are shown in the draft development framework for Clarence dock, which was published for public consultation on 27 January 1992.

Manchester City Council

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indemnify Manchester city council against any costs incurred as a result of successful prosecutions in relation to failure to fulfil its statutory duty to provide adaptations for disabled people.

Mr. Yeo: A local authority is open to legal challenge if it fails to fulfil its statutory duty to provide house adaptations for people with disabilities. There is no express power to compensate an authority for the financial consequences of a successful prosecution.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the letter of 4 February from the chairman of the Manchester city council housing committee about funding for adaptations for disabled occupants of council-owned accommodation.

Mr. Yeo: The Secretary of State has received a letter on this subject from the chair of the housing committee of Manchester city council, and I am considering what response should be made.

Estate Action

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money has been made available under the estate action programme; how many schemes have been or are being supported; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The estate action programme has now passed an important milestone—over £1 billion has been allocated to or earmarked for about 1,000 schemes since the programme began in 1986.

On 11 February 1991, the programme was relaunched with tougher criteria. We are now looking for a strategic approach which promotes comprehensive regeneration, an effective partnership between local authorities, tenants and the private sector, and housing investment which complements other urban policies.

We are backing this with substantially increased resources—in 1992-93, the estate action budget will rise to £364 million. I have been encouraged by the extent to which the approach we are advocating is reflected in the schemes put forward by authorities for inclusion in next year's programme.

Local Government (Structure)

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to publish CSL Group Ltd.'s report on guidance to the Local Government Commission on assessing costs and benefits of change in the structure of local government.

Mr. Portillo: I have placed copies of the report in the Library. I have today sent copies of it to the local authority associations and to the Audit Commission, with a request for comments by 13 March.

Urban Programme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table indicating for each year of its operation, the total allocation from the Department of the Environment for the urban programme expressed both as net expenditure at current prices and as a percentage of total urban block expenditure; and if he will indicate, for each of the next three years, his best estimate of total urban programme allocation, expressed both as net expenditure and as a percentage total of urban block expenditure.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* My Department's urban group of programmes has evolved during the 1980s from the original urban and derelict land programmes to include urban development corporations, city grant, city action teams and most recently city challenge. These various policy instruments have been developed to tackle the complex range of economic, environmental and social problems in inner city areas.

The urban programme figures include my Department's outturn/provision only. Some variations arise from different arrangements for recording other Government Departments' contributions over the period.

The figures are as follows:

Year	*Urban programme provision-outturn £ million 1991-92 prices*	*Urban programme as percentage of urban block*
1994-95	plan 238	30
1993-94	plan 232	29
1992-93	plan 245	30
1991-92	plan 242	27
1990-91	242	25
1989-90	259	29

Year	*Urban programme provision-outturn £ million 1991-92 prices*	*Urban programme as percentage of urban block*
1988-89	277	41
1987-88	326	51
1986-87	331	55
1985-86	366	58
1984-85	291	55
1983-84	261	50
1982-83	268	57
1981-82	168	58
1980-81	220	79
1979-80	193	80
1978-79	128	70
1977-78	12	40
1976-77	12	55
1975-76	16	100
1974-75	24	100
1973-74	7	100

Figures before 1973-74 are not readily available.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he took part in party-political activities in addition to official duties on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1991.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* My wife and I visited Hong Kong at our own expense in September 1991. We stayed with the governor. I took the opportunity to vist the PSA headquarters.

Wild Bird Trade

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on United Kingdom participation in the conference in Japan in March 1992 on the wild bird trade.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* A number of proposals concerning the wild bird trade have been submitted for consideration at the conference of the parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora to be held in Kyota, Japan, next month. We are considering these carefully, in consultation with our scientific advisers and other interested organisations. I will make a further statement in due course.

WALES

Toll Bridges

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the figures for the *(a)* annual income and cost and *(b)* capital debt outstanding for toll bridges in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Cleddau bridge is the only toll bridge in Wales for which we have published accounts. The figures are:

For 1990-91	*£ million*
1. Annual income (from tolls)	1·24
2. Annual cost:	
Operating Expenses	0·39
Debt and Other Charges	0·49
Total Expenditure	0·88
Outstanding debt at 31 March 1991	5·78

Fishing

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will approve the application for byelaws to regulate fishing for sea fish in coastal areas, including the Severn and Dee estuaries submitted to him by the Welsh region of the National Rivers Authority in June 1991, in time to provide protection for migratory fish during the 1992 fishing season; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: A decision on whether to approve the byelaws proposed by the National Rivers Authority will be taken shortly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Moneyreagh Primary School

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the enrolment in each of the most recent five years at Moneyreagh primary school; what plans there are to replace the temporary accommodation at this school with permanent accommodation; what provision is being made at this school for the increasing population at Moneyreagh; what proposals he has for nursery education at Moneyreagh; and if he will make a statement about education opportunities at Moneyreagh.

Dr. Mawhinney: The enrolments at Moneyreagh primary school in the last five years were as follows:

Year	*Number*
1988	134
1989	136
1990	133
1991	129
1992	136

Note: The enrolment figures given are for January in each year.

The school's approved enrolment and maximum admissions numbers for September 1992 are 171 and 26 respectively and are considered sufficient to meet the immediate demand for places. The position will be kept under review in light of enrolment trends; at present, the South-Eastern education and library board has no plans to increase the accommodation at the school or to replace the temporary accommodation.

The provision of nursery education at Moneyreagh is, in the first instance, a matter for the South Eastern education and library board; to date no proposals have been made by the board.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Paymaster-General is satisfied that the school is able to provide appropriate educational opportunities for children in the area.

Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the annual salary of the part-time chairman of Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.

Mr. Needham: £13,385.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: All relevant IT systems in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments are registered under the Data Protection Act and are therefore subject to this legislation. Each Department has registered for various purposes, and disclosure is addressed within each register entry.

For security reasons, it would be inappropriate to reveal which systems are linked to the police national computer or to other systems.

Belfast Airport

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of the new freight cargo centre at Belfast international airport.

Mr. Needham: £8,175,500.

National Insurance

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are liable to pay national insurance contributions who earn between *(a)* the lower earnings limit and *(b)* the 1991 equivalent of the 1980 level of the lower earnings limit, revalued in line with earnings.

Mr. Hanley: If the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions had been revalued in line with the increase in earnings since 1980, its present level would be £64·00. It is estimated that 15,000 people in Northern Ireland have weekly earnings between this figure and the current lower earnings limit of £52·00.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people in 1991-92 are liable to pay national insurance contributions who have earnings between the lower earnings limit and £64·80 per week in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: It is estimated that, on average, some 15,000 people in Northern Ireland with weekly earnings between £52·00, the current lower earnings limit, and £64·80 will be liable to pay national insurance contributions in 1991-92.

DEFENCE

Chemical Weapons (Destruction)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what methods are used for the destruction of chemical weapons taken into custody by the special commission of the International Atomic Energy Authority.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Chemical weapons are not taken into custody by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The United Nations special commission in Iraq is, however, charged under Security Council resolution 687 to ensure the destruction of Iraqi chemical weapons. Good progress is being made in planning for the destruction of Iraqi stocks declared or discovered to date. The special commission's destruction advisory panel has put forward proposals for the destruction of 122 mm rockets by explosive detonation and the use of fuel thereby ignited to create a destructive fireball. The Iraqis have been asked to construct an incinerator for mustard agent destruction to designs approved by the special commission, and trials of nerve agent destruction by hydrolysis were observed at the end of January 1992 by the chemical weapons inspection team in Iraq. Careful attention is being paid to safety and environmental protection in all destruction methods considered by the special commission.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the approximate cost of the United Kingdom's military commitment in Zimbabwe for training and other purposes each year since 1981-82 *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* at 1981-82 prices; and if he will list the percentage increase or decrease on the previous year for each year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to disclose the cost of assistance to individual countries.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the approximate number of United Kingdom service men operating in Zimbabwe for training and other purposes each year since 1981-82.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The number of United Kingdom service men operating in Zimbabwe (excluding the defence adviser and his staff) since 1982 are as follows:

	Numbers
1982	74
1983	104
1984	58
1985	60
1986	63
1987	50
1988	43
1989	43
1990	61
1991	58
1992	56

All figures are at 31 March except for 1982 (31 September) and 1992 (31 January). Figures for 1981 are unavailable.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy regarding the presence of United Kingdom service men in Zimbabwe for training and other purposes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government's military assistance programme in Zimbabwe aims to contribute to the maintenance of stability in the region. Following the country's independence in 1980, a British military training team has been helping to train the Zimbabwean forces. Another team has been involved in training elements of the Mozambican forces at a base in Zimbabwe.

Both teams are in Zimbabwe at the invitation of the Zimbabwean Government.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom service men while stationed in Zimbabwe have been killed, seriously injured or wounded in the course of their military duties since 1981-82.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Antares

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary for Defence what are the reasons for the delay in the consideration of possible disciplinary action following the sinking of the fishing vessel Antares; what action he has taken to speed up the consideration; when he now expects the consideration to be concluded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The question whether there should be disciplinary proceedings is entirely the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet. I understand that his decision will be made shortly. As these matters are still under consideration, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

100 (Yeomanry) Field Regiment RA

Mr. Thorne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under whose operational command 100 (Yeomanry) Field Regiment RA will come; and what will be its place within eastern district.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: On 1 April 1992, 100 (Yeomanry) Field Regiment RA will begin to re-role as a field howitzer 70 regiment supporting one of the British divisions of the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps under the operational command of 3 UK Division. Although administrative command will continue to be exercised through the Regimental Headquarters in London district for the time being, it is planned to move the RHQ into eastern district in the medium term.

Mr. Thorne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated net capital cost of the proposed changes in 100 (Yeomanry) Field Regiment RA.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The announced changes to 100 (Yeomanry) Field Regiment RA are part of the overall restructuring of the TA in response to major changes in its role—notably to support the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps. Detailed costings will not be available until clearer plans for locations have been made.

Iraq (Military Equipment)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), *Official Report*, 4 February, column *152*, what information he has as to whether any of the military equipment used by Iraq in the Gulf war and examined by the United Kingdom and its allies was *(a)* manufactured in, or *(b)* purchased from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Investigations of Iraqi military equipment recovered by the United Kingdom and the United States are continuing. Some electrical items or components of British manufacture have been found.

Military Ranges

Mr. Thorne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which ranges will be used by TA Royal Artillery batteries equipped with FH70 for *(a)* live and *(b)* dry training; and what assessment was made of the relative ease of access to such ranges by units at (i) Brighton and (ii) Bulwell.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Field howitzer 70 live firings in the United Kingdom can be conducted in training areas in Wiltshire (Salisbury plain), Wales (Sennybridge) and Northumberland (Otterburn). Dry training, at battery level, is available in East Anglia (Stanford) or in the north-west (Warcop); both areas will be used regularly by units and formations which 100 Field Regiment, RA will support in time of war. Proximity to these areas is an advantage, and access is assessed as satisfactory.

Trident

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money his Department has so far spent on the Trident programme; and how much has been contractually committed.

Mr. Alan Clark: Total expenditure for the Trident programme to the end of November 1991 was £5,074 million, and the total contractually committed £6,649 million.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in North Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1978 and May 1980.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not held in the form requested.

Regiments and Corps (Titles)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any decisions have been made regarding the titles of regiments and corps of the regular Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following titles have been approved:

The Royal Dragoon Guards (amalgamation of 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards and 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards)

The Queen's Royal Hussars (The Queen's Own and Royal Irish) (amalgamation of the Queen's Own Hussars and The Queen's Royal Irish Hussars)

The King's Royal Hussars (amalgamation of the Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales' Own) and 14th/20th King's Hussars)

The Light Dragoons (amalgamation of 13th/18th Royal Hussars (Queen Mary's Own) and 15th/19th The King's Royal Hussars)

The Queen's Royal Lancers (amalgamation of 16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers and 17th/21st Lancers)

The Royal Logistic Corps (The Corps will form in April 1993 by the amalgamation of the Royal Corps of Transport; the Royal Army Ordnance Corps; the Royal Pioneer Corps; the Army Catering Corps; and the Postal and Courier Service, Corps of Royal Engineers; as announced in "Britain's Army for the 90s" (Cm 1595) published in July 1991).

The titles of other new regiments will be announced when decisions have been taken.

Army Districts

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in restructuring Army districts.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Wales and Western district is operational, and the new eastern district will be formed in April this year. I can now confirm that the last phase of restructuring will also take effect from April this year, when it is intended that the existing south-east and south-west districts will be amalgamated to form southern district, with its headquarters in Aldershot.

The new structure will therefore comprise five Districts —Scotland, eastern, Wales and western, Southern and London.

Implications for civilian staff employed within the new southern District will be the subject of consultation with the trade unions.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Service College

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many student places have been confirmed for *(a)* local authority financed brigades and *(b)* industrial and overseas courses at the Fire Service college for the year beginning April 1992; how many student weeks each of these two categories represents; and if he will make a statement on the financial position of the college.

Mr. John Patten: Three thousand, three hundred and forty eight places covering 13,019 student weeks have so far been confirmed for local authority fire brigades for the year from 1 April 1992. One hundred and sixty nine places covering 263 student weeks have been confirmed for the industrial and overseas sectors, others being held in reserve until the full demand from the local authority sector, the college's primary customer, is known and met. This position is consistent with the college's business plan, by which it aims to meet its expenditure wholly from income, provide high quality training and deliver good value for money.

Police Cells

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners in police cells committed acts of self-injury or attempted suicide in 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is not recorded centrally.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Data Protection Registrar has studied the privacy implications that arise from the combination of publicly available council tax information with *(a)* the sale of the electoral register, *(b)* public extracts of the community charge register, *(c)* anonymised census information and *(d)* county court judgments; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The enforcement of the Data Protection Act 1984 is a matter for the Data Protection Registrar, the data protection tribunal and, ultimately the courts. I understand, however, that the registrar is currently studying certain data-matching issues.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what is the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information is not readily available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Home Office has 151 systems processing personal data registered under the Data Protection Act 1984. All Home Office systems processing such data are registered under the Act and are used as described in their registration. That procedure will apply also to any new systems which may be brought into use in the future.

Electoral Registration Form

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to introduce an electoral registration form which has a statement indicating that a voter's personal data can be used and disclosed without the knowledge and consent of the voter.

Mrs. Rumbold: No. The only information taken from the electoral registration form which is published is that which is requried for the register of electors. The purpose of the electoral register is to provide a comprehensive and publicly available list of the names and addresses of those who are eligible to vote. Since the register is a public document, making the information contained in it available cannot be held to constitute a breach of confidentiality.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many meetings he has had with representatives from organisations about the contents of the proposed European directive on data protection; how many meetings were with organisations representing the interests of data users; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Ministers have had two, and officials a number of, meetings with organisations which asked to see the Home Office. All represented data users.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards agreement on the proposed European directive on data protection.

Mrs. Rumbold: Discussions in the Council's working group continue. The European Parliament is considering the draft directive. The European Commission is expected to produce a revised draft in the light of the views of the European Parliament.

Data Protection (Prosecutions)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each prosecution brought under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1984 since 1987, detailing the nature of the offence, the section of the Act used, the year, and whether the prosecution was successful; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Prosecutions brought under the Act by the Data Protection Registrar are listed in his fifth, sixth and seventh annual reports to Parliament. Prosecutions under the Act initiated by the Director of Public Prosecutions are not separately listed.

Isobutylnitrite

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions are in force for the sale of the chemical isobutylnitrate; and if he will add it to the list of solvents known to be damaging to children.

Mr. John Patten: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the chemical known as isobutylnitrite; it is one of a group of chemicals known as alkylnitrites. Isobutylnitrite—which currently has no licit medical use—is not strictly speaking a solvent, but it can be misused by inhalation of its vapours. Sales of intoxicating substances are regulated by the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985 which makes it an offence for people such as retailers to sell or supply intoxicating substances to persons under 18 who they believe intend to misuse them. The Act has no specific list of chemicals: there is a wide range of everyday products which can be misused by inhalation. The Government have provided funding for Re-Solv, which has issued guidance leaflets to retailers advising them how to recognise signs that a young person may be misusing such substances and how to refuse to sell them. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has recommended against bringing alkylnitrites under the control of the misuse of drugs legislation as their use in the community does not appear to pose a serious social problem.

Malicious Communications Act 1988

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1991.

Mr. John Patten: In England and Wales in 1989, there were 49 prosecutions under the Malicious Communications Act 1988. Information collected centrally for 1990 does not identify offences committed under this specific Act from other summary offences. 1991 data are not yet available.

Data Protection (European Directive)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the position of each of the other EC countries with respect to the content of the proposed European directive on data protection in relation to *(a)* the inclusion of manual files in the directive, *(b)* the consent requirements, *(c)* the inclusion of personal data held for national security purposes and *(d)* the proposals with respect to direct mail and profiling; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: It would not be appropriate to attempt to describe the position of each member state on each of these issues. Discussion in the Council's working group has shown that some countries tend to favour the approach taken by the Commission's draft directive (SYN 287), which includes manual files and provisions for notification and consent of the data subject. Other countries, have been arguing for a directive closer to the Council of Europe's convention 108 on data processing, which applies only to computerised personal data and does not have consent provisions as such; and other countries favour an element of both approaches.

Data Protection Registrar (Briefing Materials)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the titles of the briefing materials presented to the Data Protection Registrar in relation to *(a)* TREVI, *(b)* Schengen, *(c)* the DNA database and *(d)* the new Police National Computer.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that the Data Protection Registrar has received correspondence and documents relating to European police, immigration and customs systems, the keeping of DNA records and the new police national computer. It would not be appropriate or practicable to list correspondence and documents by title.

Drugs Seizures

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of successful seizures of illegal drugs in the past five years have been made *(a)* by police and *(b)* by customs officers.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is contained in table 2.3 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Statistics of the misuse of drugs: seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1990", a copy of which is in the Library. Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

Crime (Tower Hamlets)

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of burglaries of *(a)* domestic dwellings and *(b)* all other buildings in Tower Hamlets for each year between 1985 and 1990.

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in Tower Hamlets for each year from 1985 and 1990.

Mr. John Patten: The available information for Tower Hamlets is given in the following table.

Notifiable offences recorded in Tower Hamlets 1985-90

Year	Burglary In dwelling	 Other building	Total notifiable offences
1985	[1]—	[1]—	23,967
1986	2,484	2,574	27,797
1987	2,586	2,305	25,342

Year	*Burglary* *In dwelling*	*Other building*	*Total notifiable offences*
1988	2,256	1,931	23,914
1989	2,549	2,148	26,218
1990	2,463	2,163	25,998

[1] Not readily available.

West Indies

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of *(a)* Trinidad and Tobago, *(b)* Guyana, *(c)* Barbados and *(d)* Jamaica have (i) been admitted and (ii) been refused admittance and removed each month during the period January to December 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is given in the table.

Selected nationalities admitted to, and refused leave to enter and removed from, the United Kingdom in 1991.

Number of persons

Trinidad and Tobago	*Total admitted*	*Total refused leave to enter and removed*
January[1]	1,110	7
February[1]	800	13
March[1]	1,100	7
April	1,160	6
May	1,160	6
June	1,710	4
July	2,000	4
August	2,090	1
September	1,680	4
October	1,390	7
November	950	4
December	..	7
Year	..	70

Guyana	*Total admitted*	*Total refused leave to enter and removed*
January[1]	300	3
February[1]	300	4
March[1]	380	6
April	340	1
May	450	6
June	490	7
July	610	2
August	830	5
September	590	7
October	470	8
November	370	3
December	n/a	5
Year	n/a	57

n/a = Not available.

Bardados	*Total admitted*	*Total refused leave to enter and remove*
January[1]	360	5
February[1]	250	3
March[1]	400	2
April	500	2
May	590	1
June	1,010	5
July	1,200	4
August	1,060	1
September	830	2
October	590	—
November	460	1
December	n/a	—
Year	n/a	26

n/a = Not available.

Jamaica	*Total admitted*	*Total refused leave to enter and removed*
January[1]	1,700	33
February[1]	1,340	32
March[1]	1,650	37
April	1,770	34
May	2,040	36
June	2,800	32
July	3,240	50
August	3,210	12
September	2,640	28
October	1,880	33
November	1,730	26
December	n.a.	39
Year	n.a.	392

[1] Admissions data have been revised.

n.a. Not yet available.

Passports

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms exist to enable embassies and high commissions in the United Kingdom, where they have received an application from one of their nationals for a replacement passport, to consult local police forces to establish whether a report has been received of a lost passport or other details about the applicant.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Anyone reporting a lost or stolen passport to a local police station will receive a unique reference number specific to that report. This will enable an embassy or high commission to confirm with the police force concerned that a report was made of a lost or stolen passport. No other details about an applicant would be relevant to such an inquiry.

Life Sentences (Parole)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recommendations by the Parole Board for the releases on parole or licence of prisoners serving life sentences have been *(a)* accepted and *(b)* rejected by him in each year since 1981.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information on the numbers of life sentence prisoners recommended as suitable for release by the Parole Board and the numbers of those recommendations not accepted by Home Secretaries is published in successive annual reports of the Parole Board. For convenience, the figures for 1981-90, which include re-releases following a period in prison after recall from a previous licence, are set out in the table. Parole Board recommendations of "suitable for release" have been for dates ranging from the immediate future to up to two and a half years ahead.

Life sentence prisoners recommended for release by the Parole Board 1981-90

Year of recommendation	*Recommended*	*Not accepted by Home Secretary*
1981	147	4
1982	144	5
1983	121	16
1984	112	10
1985	94	16
1986	120	14
1987	147	23
1988	91	13
1989	119	15
1990	138	41

Mr. Abdul Farooq

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the post in Islamabad was advised to issue a visa to Mr. Abdul Farooq Ref. TH/14646/90, to join his wife in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I shall write to the hon. Member.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Walvis Bay

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 432 regarding Walvis bay; and what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking in pursuit of this policy.

Mrs. Chalker: When voting in favour of UN Security Council resolution 432, we stated that this issue was best resolved through bilateral negotiation between the Governments of Namibia and South Africa. We have urged the South African Government to negotiate constructively, and welcome the progress made since bilateral talks commenced in March 1991.

Angola

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on his policy towards the achievement of a settlement in Angola and the representations which he is making to the parties involved.

Mrs. Chalker: We attach importance to the convening of free and fair elections in September 1992 in completion of the settlement agreed in Portugal on 31 May 1991 which ended the Angolan civil war. We have regular discussions with both sides, and are assisting in the formation of a new integrated army to help bring stability to the country.

Mozambique

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on his policy towards the achievement of a settlement in Mozambique and the representations which he is making to the parties involved.

Mrs. Chalker: We seek the earliest possible end to the fighting in Mozambique and have been encouraged by recent progress in the peace talks in Rome. We are members of the joint verification commission, which was set up to monitor the partial ceasefire agreement of 1 December 1990, and have participated in European Community démarches to both parties encouraging them to reach early agreement. In addition to regular bilateral contact with the Mozambican Government, we have urged RENAMO to adhere to the partial ceasefire and reach an early comprehensive settlement.

Civil Rights

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will take into account the civil rights record of a country and, in particular, its use of capital punishment and the persecution of any group of people in respect of their sexual orientation, ethnic background, religion or minority status before he establishes or re-establishes diplomatic relations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: When considering whether to establish or re-establish diplomatic relations with a country, we judge each case on its merits.

Qaiser Khan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision is to be made on the application of Qaiser Khan, Ref. CON/3343, to the post in Islamabad for British citizenship; when his application was submitted; when he was interviewed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Qaiser Khan's application form, which was dated 9 October 1989, was submitted to the British high commission at Islamabad on 6 December 1989. In interview on 27 February 1990, the family were asked to produce a further document in support of the application. To date, that document has not been received and the application therefore remains pending.

I have asked the high commission for a full report on the case and will write to the hon. Member when it is to hand.

Albania

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the United Kingdom has made to the special account for emergency aid for Albania, opened by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

In conjunction with the local authority associations, the Government launched an appeal on 4 February to help Albanian schoolchildren. Aimed at schools and other educational institutions, the appeal seeks their help in providing a number of essential items such as paper, exercise books, books, pens, pencils and educational toys. Feed the Children, a charity operating in Albania, is administering the day-to-day running of the appeal with financial assistance from the Government towards the administrative costs of collection, storage, transportation and distribution of the material raised.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the oral answer of the Minister for Overseas Development on 9 December, *Official Report*, column *607*, on East Timor, what review has taken place of the United Kingdom aid programme to Indonesia.

Mrs. Chalker: As far as new commitments are concerned, following the shootings in East Timor on 12 November, we concluded that projects already agreed would continue as planned.

We also concluded that projects under our technical assistance programme should continue to be developed as planned. The next major such project is in support of primary education.

As for capital aid, the second concessional loan with Indonesia expired in August 1991. No decisions have been made about a successor agreement.

Development Market Research

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will adopt development market research for the design and implementation of development projects in Overseas Development Administration activities;

(2) what is the policy of the Overseas Development Administration on the use of market and opinion research in relevant target areas when evaluating the feasibility of development projects;

(3) if he will consider the use of the "Training Manual for Development Market Research Investigators" recently published by the BBC World Service to benefit aid projects in which Britain is involved.

Mrs. Chalker: Aid projects in developing countries are very varied in nature. The Overseas Development Administration takes forecast demand, users' willingness to pay and the views and opinions of people affected into consideration in designing and appraising projects, as appropriate. The techniques used are numerous and are constantly being refined. They could, in some instances, involve procedures used in market research, including those used by the BBC.

Angola

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy regarding Overseas Development Administration spending in Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: British bilateral aid to Angola totalled £1·2 million in 1990. It was divided more or less equally between food and other emergency aid and technical co-operation, mainly in support of English language teaching. The attainment of peace in Angola has opened the prospect of a more substantial aid involvement and present plans include assistance for the forthcoming elections, support for the resettlement of refugees, displaced persons and ex-combatants and continued assistance with the teaching of English, with which we are particularly well placed to help.

Mozambique

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy regarding Overseas Development Administration spending in Mozambique.

Mrs. Chalker: British bilateral aid to Mozambique totalled £25·4 million in 1990. Of that, £12 million was in the form of balance-of-payments assistance in support of the continuing programme of economic reform, while project aid—devoted primarily to the rehabilitation of transport infrastructure—and technical co-operation mainly in the form of manpower assistance, consultancies and training, accounted for some £3 million each. A further £6 million took the form of food and other emergency aid in response to the long-standing emergency. Expenditure is likely to remain substantial in the period immediately ahead.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Allowances

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he intends to take to advertise the new disability allowances; and at what time of day he intends adverts to be screened on television.

Mr. Scott: The advertising campaign for disability living allowance and disability working allowance commenced on 5 February. The campaign includes television commercials, supported by advertising in the national, local, specialist and ethnic press, as well as a number of other publications. The television commercials are being shown at various times throughout the day and evening, on both ITV and Channel 4. The current schedule is available in the Library. The advertisements invite people to telephone a freephone number or send off a coupon to a freepost address to obtain the "Guide to New Benefits for Disabled People".

The advertisements form part of a larger publicity campaign targeted at disabled people, carers, advisers and health professionals. As part of this campaign, we have written to over 1 million existing beneficiaries of attendance allowance and mobility allowance to let them know about the benefit changes and how to claim extra help, if appropriate. We are also writing to organisations of and for disabled people, advisers and health professionals—such as doctors, nurses and therapists—telling them about the benefits and how they can help their clients and patients to claim. We are also making use of the new out-of-hours service BBC Select to broadcast a series of information programmes about DLA and DWA.

The key materials—including the commercials and advertisements—have been researched with disabled people, and the campaign has been prepared in liaison with representatives of organisations of and for disabled people.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what training and advice has been given to staff in preparation for the introduction of the new disability allowances on 15 April.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the new disability benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member, and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Residential Care

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to ensure that the personal expenses allowance for those in residential care or nursing homes is ring-fenced from being used to meet shortfalls between the maximum income support limit and the weekly residential care charge.

Miss Widdecombe: How the personal expenses allowance is used is a matter for the claimant. From April 1993, local authorities will ensure that people placed under the new community care arrangements will retain an amount of their income for personal expenses.

Terminal Illness

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the definition of terminal illness used for those cared for in hospices and residential care nursing homes deemed eligible for the higher income support limit; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: People staying in a nursing home which is able to provide a level of care appropriate to someone suffering from a terminal illness may receive the terminal illness limit if they are actually receiving such care.

Retirement Pension

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people would benefit by increasing the retirement pension for a single pensioner by £5 in each constituency in Merseyside and in the constituencies of Ellesmere Port and Neston; Chester; Warrington, South; Halton; and Lancashire, West;

(2) how many couples would gain by an increase in the retirement pension for a married couple in each Merseyside constituency and in the constituencies of Ellesmere Port and Neston; Chester; Warrington, South; Halton; and Lancashire, West.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Community Charge

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people would benefit and on average by how much from abolition of the 20 per cent. minimum rule for the payment of the community charge as it affects people in receipt of benefit in each Merseyside constituency and in the constituencies of Ellesmere Port and Neston; Chester; Warrington, South; Halton; and Lancashire, West.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available information relates to August 1991, and at that time about 287,000 people were receiving community charge benefit on Merseyside as a whole, of which about 155,000 were in receipt of income support. Abolishing the 20 per cent. community charge contribution by awarding maximum rebates of 100 per cent. of liability would help all those currently receiving benefit. In addition, a number of people would become entitled to benefit for the first time. In the Merseyside area as a whole, the 20 per cent. contribution is currently estimated to be £1·13 a week and, assuming no reduction in the amounts currently included in income-related benefit levels to help towards the 20 per cent. contribution, all current benefit recipients would gain to this extent.

Information concerning the individual constituencies requested is not available.

Source: August 1991 Management Information System.

Pensions

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate as to the effect on future funds of the Maastricht pensions protocol overriding the Barber judgment on equal treatment in pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: The protocol to article 119 of the treaty of Rome, which was agreed at Maastricht, is intended to clarify the retrospective effect of the Barber judgment—it does not overturn the judgment. The full implications of the protocol are still being considered.

Private Nursing Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what qualifications and training adjudication officers have in order to establish whether claimants in receipt of income support towards private nursing care *(a)* actually require such care and *(b)* are in receipt of it;

(2) what steps are taken by adjudication officers to confirm that in addition to residing in private nursing homes, claimants of income support towards private nursing care are *(a)* in receipt of such care and *(b)* actually in need of such care.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Social Fund

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how social fund budgets are adapted to meet increased demands arising from increased unemployment; and what account is taken of regional trends in unemployment in setting the budgets.

Mr. Scott: The trend in unemployment is one of the factors taken into account during our routine reviews of the amounts allocated to the national and district social fund budgets. These reviews have resulted in total increases of £49·6 million to the discretionary budget in 1991-92.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the remaining social fund budget of the Wakefield district Benefits Agency office.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member, and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of successful claims for the last three years for which figures were available for *(a)* social fund loans and *(b)* social fund grants in (i) Wakefield, (ii) Yorkshire and Humberside and (iii) the United Kingdom.

Mr. Scott: Such information as is available is in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action is taken to assist benefit agency offices when increased claims exceed social fund budgets during any financial year.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the benefits agency. He will write to the hon. Member, and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

National Insurance

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in 1991-92 are liable to pay national insurance contributions who have earnings between the lower earnings limit and £64·80 per week in Great Britain.

Mr. Jack: It is estimated that, on average, some 600,000 people with weekly earnings between the lower earnings limit and £64·80 will be liable to pay national insurance contributions in 1991-92.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the current lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions if revalued from its 1980 level in line with earnings; and how many people have weekly earnings between this figure and the current lower earnings limit.

Mr. Jack: If the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions had been revalued in line with the increase in earnings since 1980, its present level would be £64. It is estimated that nearly 600,000 people have weekly earnings between this figure and the current lower earnings limit of £52.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the calculated public expenditure on benefits and grants to local authorities for benefit subsidy for rate rebates in England and Wales, and community charge benefit in Scotland, for income support claimants in Great Britain in 1989-90.

Miss Widdecombe: Outturn figures are not available in the form requested. However, we estimate that rate rebate subsidy paid to local authorities in England and Wales in respect of income support claimants for 1989-90 was about £730 million. The comparable estimate of benefit subsidy for community charge rebates in Scotland is £120 million.

Local Office, Stratford

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give details of the refurbishment programme for the Jubilee department of social security offices in Stratford, London E15.

Miss Widdecombe: The planning for the refurbishment of local DSS offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available, and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the policy of the Child Support Agency on demanding maintenance payments from former husbands regardless of whether a former wife has asked for such payments or whether a court has imposed a maintenance order in cases where the former wife is claiming income support.

Mr. Jack *[pursuant to his reply, 27 January 1992, c. 469-470]:* Incorrect information was given in the reply. The correct information is as follows:

From April 1993, the Child Support Agency will take over from the courts the main responsibility for obtaining maintenance for children. It will provide a service for use by all families for whom child maintenance is an issue whether they are on benefit or not. Where the parent with care of a child claims income support, family credit or disability working allowance provisions in the Child Support Act 1991 mean that she will be expected to authorise the Child Support Agency to take maintenance action for her child. The agency will not act without such authorisation. Experience shows that most parents wish to co-operate in arranging financial support for the benefit of their children. It is very much in the child's interest that both parents should do what they can to support their child.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House of Commons Services

Mr. Harris: To ask the Lord President of the Council what arrangements will be made for answering hon. Members' questions relating to the services of the House, following the appointment of the new committees recommended in Sir Robin Ibbs' report on House of Commons services.

Mr. MacGregor: I intend in the near future to make a minor change in the question rota consequent upon the replacement of the Services Committee by the Finance and Services Committee and the new Domestic Committees. After consultation with the House of Commons Commission, I have agreed that a small amount of time should be set aside for oral questions to the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee, who will respond in particular to questions concerning the estimates for House of Commons expenditure (which will be prepared under his Committee's supervision), the financial performance of Departments of the House, and the financial implications of any new or expanded services which may be proposed by the committees appointed under Standing Order No. 125 (Domestic Committees).

In order to accommodate these questions without further consequential changes to the rest of the question rota, I intend to arrange for questions to the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee to be taken every third Monday at 3.20 pm, with questions to the Lord President of the Council as Leader of the House following at 3.25 pm.

Questions to the Member answering on behalf of the House of Commons Commission will continue to be taken every sixth Monday, at 3.15 pm.

In addition, following the replacement of the Services Committee by individual Domestic Committees, Questions concerning the exercise of the responsibilities of those Committees should be tabled for written answer to the Chairman of the Committee concerned.

I shall, of course, continue to answer questions on a wide range of matters as Leader of the House.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what data information systems his office has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Duchy of Lancaster office has a data information system for routine administrative purposes. It is not linked to any other computer system. The office is bound by the Data Protection Act 1984 to the extent specified in section 38 of the Act.

HEALTH

Mental Illness

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total number of beds available in the NHS hospitals in the Greater Manchester area, for the treatment of mental illness in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is as follows:

Number of available beds for mental illness

Greater Manchester health districts	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	[1]*Community reprovision*
Bolton	227	226	244	0
Bury	117	133	128	7
North Manchester	321	298	271	19
Central Manchester	84	87	88	21
South Manchester	242	220	206	1
Oldham	199	203	190	20
Rochdale	132	132	136	0
Salford	1,018	903	788	128
Stockport	286	269	273	0
Tameside and Glossop	185	145	169	19
Trafford	150	130	119	8
Wigan	290	277	238	30
Total	3,231	3,023	2,850	253

[1] *Source:* District Purchasing Plans Quarterly Monitoring Community 1991-92.

Management Executive

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the present organisational structure of the NHS management executive with the numbers of staff involved in each directorate area and division within their grades.

Mr. Dorrell: The present structure of the NHS management executive and the numbers of staff involved are shown in the tables.

NHS Management Executive
Staff in Post on 1 January 1992

Chief Executive and Directors	*Number*
Grade 1a	1
Grade 2	6
Principal Nursing Officer	1
Total	[1]8

[1] non-executive Director

Corporate Affairs Directorate

Central Management of the Management Executive	*Number*
Grade 5	2
Senior Medical Officer	1
Grade 7	6·5
Senior Executive Officer	6
Higher Executive Officer	15
Executive Officer	13
Administrative Officer	7
Administrative Assistant	5
Personal Secretary	4
Typist	1
Total	60·5

Policy unit	*Number*
Grade 5	1
Senior Executive Officer	1
Personal Secretary	1
TOTAL	3

Information management group	*Number*
Grade 3	1
Grade 5	2
Grade 6	2
Grade 7	15
Senior Executive Officer	19
Higher Executive Officer	16
Executive Officer	12
Administrative Officer	11
Administrative Assistant	4
Personal Secretary	5
Consultants	39
NHS Technical and Administrative Support	34
TOTAL	160

Economic and operational research	*Number*
Grade 5	2
Grade 7	7
Economic Assistant/Senior Economic Assistant	3
Senior/Higher/Scientific Officer	3
Executive Officer	1
Personal Secretary	1
TOTAL	17

Personnel and Resources in the Management Executive

	Number
Grade 5	1
Grade 6	2
Grade 7	4
Senior Executive Officer	2
Higher Executive Officer	13
Executive Officer	12
Administrative Officer	5
Administrative Assistant	1
Senior Personal Secretary	1
Personal Secretary	2
Total	43

Performance Management Directorate

	Number
Grade 3	1
Grade 4	2
Grade 5	5
Grade 6	2
Grade 7	21
Senior Executive Officer	1
Higher Executive Officer	15
Executive Officer	16
Administrative Officer	7
Administrative Assistant	5
Senior Personal Secretary	4
Personal Secretary	7
Total	86

Research and Development Directorate

	Number
Grade 4	1
Grade 5	1
Grade 6	2
Grade 7	2
Senior Executive Officer	2
Higher Executive Officer	6
Executive Officer	4
Administrative Officer	6
Administrative Assistant	2
Personal Secretary	1
Total	29

Finance and Corporate Information Directorate

	Number
Finance	
Grade 3	1·0
Grade 5	4·0
Grade 6	2·0
Grade 7	14·5
Senior Executive Officer	5·0
Higher Executive Officer	22·0
Executive Officer	17·0
Administrative Officer	15·5
Administrative Assistant	3·0
Senior Personal Secretary	1·0
Personal Secretary	6·0
Total	90·0

Corporate Information	*Number*
Grade 5	2·0
Grade 6	3·0
Grade 7	15·0
Senior Executive Officer	3·0
Higher Executive Officer	11·0
Executive Officer	14·0
Administrative Officer	5·0
Administrative Assistant	2·0
Personal Secretary	2·0
Total	47·0

Health Care Directorate

	Number
Medical manpower and education	
Grade 3	1·0
Grade 5	4·0
Grade 7	4·0
Senior Executive Officer	2·0
Higher Executive Officer	5·0
Executive Officer	9·0
Administrative Officer	2·0
Administrative Assistant	2·0
Personal Secretary	3·0
Senior Personal Secretary	1·0
Typist	1·0
Total	34·0

	Number
Services development	
Grade 3	2·0
Grade 5	6·5
Grade 6	2·5
Grade 7	11·0
Senior Executive Officer	5·0
Higher Executive Officer	9·0
Executive Officer	13·0
Administrative Officer	10·0
Administrative Assistant	3·0
Senior Personal Secretary	3·0
Personal Secretary	7·0
Typist	1·0
Total	73·0

	Number
Public health	
Grade 3	1·0
Grade 5	4·5
Higher Executive Officer	2·0
Senior Personal Secretary	1·0
Personal Secretary	2·5
Total	11·0

Nursing Directorate

	Number
Grade 3	1·0
Grade 5	1·0
Grade 6	13·0
Higher Executive Officer	1·0
Executive Officer	0·6
Administrative Officer	1·0
Senior Personal Secretary	1·0
Personal Secretary	8·0
Total	26·6

Personnel Directorate
Personnel development division (including NHS Women's Unit)

	Number
Grade 3	1·0
Grade 5	2·0
Grade 6	1·0
Grade 7	·5
Senior Executive Officer	3·5
Higher Executive Officer	5·0
Executive Officer	3·0
Administrative Officer	3·0
Administrative Assistant	1·0
Personal Secretary	1·0
Total	21

Health Authority Personnel (including HAP Statistics)

	Number
Grade 3	1·0
Grade 4	1·0
Grade 5	4·0
Grade 6	2·0
Grade 7	12·5
Senior Executive Officer	9·5
Higher Executive Officer	26·0
Executive Officer	31·5
Administrative Officer	25·0
Administrative Assistant	9·0
Senior Personal Secretary	2·0
Personal Secretary	5·0
Typist	2·0
Total	130·5

Health authority superannuation branch

	Number
Grade 6	1·0
Grade 7	4·0
Senior Executive Officer	12·0
Higher Executive Officer	32·0
Executive Officer	102·0
Administrative Officer	277·0
Administrative Assistant	106·5
Personal Secretary	1·0
Support Manager Grade 3	1·0
Support Grade Band 1	8·0
Support Grade Band 2	46·0
Typist	13·5
TOTAL	604·0

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the numbers of staff employed on the NHS management executive, and the cost of salary ranges of such staff *(a)* before the functions review took place and *(b)* at the present time.

Mr. Dorrell: Before the functions review took place there was a chief executive and nine directors, plus one part-time non-executive director, on the NHS management executive at an annual cost of £719,492. The salary range was £44,205 to £85,447. One director was on secondment for whose services a fee is paid. Following the functions review there is the chief executive and seven directors plus one part-time non-executive director. The annual cost is £591,614 and the salary range is £44,205 to £85,447, with a fee paid in respect of one director.

Local Authority Secure Places

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many approved local authority secure places were available in the northern region on 1 January 1985 and on the same date in each succeeding year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information collected centrally relates to the position at 31 March, and is shown in the table.

Number of approved places available in secure units in the Northern Region

Year	*Number of approved places available at 31 March*
1985	51
1986	53
1987	53
1988	53
1989	58
1990	55
[1]1991	49

[1] Provisional.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what external audit requirements he has imposed on NHS trusts and companies and trade subsidiaries linked to trusts; and whether he has required external auditors to report on the financial performance and prospects of trusts and their related companies and financial subsidiaries to him, to the trust directors, to Parliament and to the public.

Mr. Dorrell: NHS trusts will be externally audited by the Audit Commission. External auditors will certify public annual financial statements to ensure that they represent a true and fair view of the state of affairs of a NHS trust and of its income and expenditure for the year in question.

NHS trusts are firmly part of the NHS and will therefore be included in the Audit Commission's programme of NHS value for money studies.

Financial statements will be adopted by the boards of NHS trusts, and presented to the general public at annual meetings. Summarised accounts will be laid before Parliament.

NHS trusts have no powers to set up subsidiary or trading companies.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reporting requirements he has laid on NHS trusts for financial information; what information he has required them to produce in public annual financial reports; and if he will require them to produce information on salary ranges and other data analogous to that in company reports.

Mr. Dorrell: All NHS trusts are required to produce financial information for NHS management executive monitoring purposes on a quarterly basis. Published annual financial statements for each trust will generally follow commercial disclosure requirements. They will show the number of employees receiving remuneration of over £40,000 in bands of £5,000. They will also show the emoluments of the highest paid board member separately and the number of board members receiving emoluments in bands of £5,000 with no lower limit.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often he proposes to report the statistical returns from NHS trusts to Parliament; in what form employment returns will be reported; and whether NHS trust employment continues to be included in the overall returns for district, regional and national NHS hospital and community health service data.

Mr. Dorrell: NHS trusts are required to return the same kind of data to the management executive as other provider units, that is, activity data, and manpower information. The latter is in the form of the numbers of medical and non-medical staff employed and the numbers joining and leaving. This information forms part of the national aggregated NHS data returns. It is not routinely reported to Parliament but is included in statistical publications such as statistical bulletins and the annual volume "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what internal audit requirements he has imposed on NHS trusts; whether he has required asset sales and acquisitions to be reported to him and the trust board; and whether he has required companies and trading subsidiaries linked to NHS trusts to report to him and the trust board, Parliament and the public.

Mr. Dorrell: The trust management is responsible for ensuring that an adequate internal audit function is established. The objectives and scope of internal audit within the trust should be based upon the principles described in the NHS internal audit manual. External auditors will report on the adequacy of financial controls, including internal audit, within NHS trusts.

Trusts are required to submit details of major capital expenditure and asset sales on a quarterly basis to the NHS management executive. NHS trust boards will determine what management information they require to ensure that they meet their statutory financial duties.

Trusts will prepare annual financial statements to be adopted by the board, submitted to the NHS management executive, and presented to the general public at annual meetings. Summarised accounts will be laid before Parliament.

NHS trusts have no power to set up subsidiary or trading companies.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will list the items of data that comprise the contract minimum data set; what representations his Department has received as to whether the current procedures surrounding the security of the data set are adequate; what plans he has to indemnify health authorities should an individual be awarded compensation for the damage caused by breach of security; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The data items that comprise the general in-patient contract minimum data set are set out in the list.

Contract minimum data set general in-patients

- Contract Details
- Contract Identifier

- Patient Details
- Patient's name

Patient's Usual Address
HA Code (Of Residence)
Sex
Marital Status
Birth Date
Code of GP (Registered)

Provider Spell Details
Code of GP (Referring)
Code of GP Practice
Category of Patient
Decided to Admit Date

Start Date (Hospital Provider Spell)
Admission Method
Duration of Elective Wait
Intended Management
Source of Admission
End Date (Hospital Provider Spell)
Discharge Method
Discharge Destination
Patient Classification
Chronically Sick or Disabled

Consultant Episode Details
Local Patient Identifier
Episode Number
Start Date (Consultant Episode)
End Date (Consultant Episode)
Overseas Visitor Status
Specialty
Specialty (Shared Care Episode)
Code of Consultant
Code of Consultant (Shared Care Episode)

Patient Diagnosis:
Primary
Subsidiary (if necessary)
(1-5)

Patient Operative Procedure:

Primary Operation
Procedure Code
Date
Member of Consultant Firm (Surgeon)
Member of Consultant Firm (Anaesthetist)
2nd Operation—4th Operation
(As above)

The Department has not received any representations specifically about the procedures for the secure handling of the contract minimum data set. Ensuring the security of personal health information is a prime concern of the Department of the medical profession and of NHS Managers. We are currently exploring whether steps need be taken further to strengthen security in the handling of those data sets.

There are no plans to indemnify health authorities in the event of compensation being awarded as a result of a breach of security.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the Police National Computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has a large number of data information systems. It would not be possible to fully document these other than at disproportionate cost. Where appropriate departmental systems are registered under the Data Protection Act 1984. Where there is a requirement to link to other computer systems the provisions of the Act are taken fully into account.

Anti-depressant Drugs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure per head of population on general practitioner prescribed anti-depressant drugs in each NHS region and family health service authority area for the second half of 1991; and what were the corresponding figures for equivalent periods in 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information for 1991 is not yet available. The figures for 1988, 1989 and 1990 are given in the table.

Anti-depressants
Cost per head of population

FHSA *Regional health authority*	*1988* £	*1989* £	*1990* £
Cleveland	0·90	1·04	1·16
Cumbria	0·88	1·15	1·02
Durham	1·09	0·97	1·13
Northumberland	0·98	0·93	0·85
Gateshead	0·83	1·11	1·37
Newcastle	1·00	1·13	1·29
North Tyneside	1·00	1·00	1·37
South Tyneside	0·79	0·89	1·02
Sunderland	0·66	0·71	0·82
Northern regional health authority	0·92	1·00	1·10
Humberside	0·71	0·83	0·87
North Yorkshire	0·64	0·88	0·81
Bradford	0·80	1·02	0·95
Calderdale	0·87	0·76	1·17
Kirklees	0·70	0·76	1·17
Leeds	1·04	1·41	1·17
Wakefield	0·77	0·81	1·30
Yorkshire regional health authority	0·79	0·97	1·01
Derbyshire	0·63	0·70	0·82
Leicester	0·69	0·65	0·84
Lincoln	0·67	0·70	0·71
Nottinghamshire	0·56	0·60	0·72
Barnsley	0·55	0·94	1·14
Doncaster	0·65	0·74	0·84
Rotherham	0·74	0·86	0·88
Sheffield	0·83	0·86	0·90
Trent regional health authority	0·66	0·71	0·82
Cambridgeshire	0·42	0·50	0·81
Norfolk	0·60	0·72	0·93
Suffolk	0·67	0·83	0·79
East Anglia RHA	0·56	0·69	0·85
Bedford	0·49	0·59	0·84
Hertfordshire	0·60	0·61	0·82
Barnet	0·52	0·56	0·69
Brent and Harrow	0·56	0·44	0·56
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0·45	0·64	0·87
Hillingdon	0·63	0·72	0·72
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	0·64	0·84	1·09
North West Thames RHA	0·55	0·61	0·80
Essex	0·57	0·62	0·76
Barking and Havering	0·54	0·59	0·60
Camden and Islington	1·04	0·68	0·92
City and East London	0·50	0·63	0·78
Enfield and Harringey	0·67	0·52	0·49

FHSA *Regional health authority*	*1988* *£*	*1989* *£*	*1990* *£*
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0·42	0·69	0·78
North East Thames RHA	0·59	0·62	0·73
East Sussex	0·65	0·77	0·95
Kent	0·64	0·75	0·82
Bexley and Greenwich	0·41	0·51	0·47
Bromley	0·61	0·60	1·00
Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark	0·62	0·62	0·71
South East Thames RHA	0·61	0·69	0·80
Surrey	0·69	0·81	0·81
West Sussex	0·61	0·56	0·89
Croydon	0·76	0·88	0·69
Kingston and Richmond	0·71	0·70	0·88
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0·61	0·70	0·78
South West Thames RHA	0·66	0·72	0·82
Dorset	0·80	0·83	0·91
Hampshire	0·73	0·75	0·90
Wiltshire	0·74	0·95	0·95
Isle of Wight	0·89	0·91	0·80
Wessex RHA	0·75	0·81	0·91
Berkshire	0·64	0·58	0·72
Buckinghamshire	0·59	0·55	0·54
Northamptonshire	0·53	0·57	0·63
Oxfordshire	0·41	0·42	0·57
Oxford RHA	0·55	0·53	0·62
Avon	0·58	0·74	0·80
Cornwall	0·47	0·70	0·79
Devon	0·69	0·81	0·92
Gloucester	0·74	0·76	0·96
Somerset	0·65	0·83	0·69
South Western RHA	0·63	0·77	0·84
Hereford and Worcester	0·67	0·78	0·95
Salop	0·65	0·61	0·89
Staffordshire	0·63	0·56	0·79
Warwickshire	0·61	0·58	0·70
Birmingham	0·72	0·79	0·88
Coventry	0·55	0·74	0·80
Dudley	0·58	0·73	0·68
Sandwell	0·77	1·06	1·13
Solihull	0·81	0·66	1·17
Walsall	0·82	0·91	1·10
Wolverhampton	0·70	0·87	1·01
West Midlands RHA	0·67	0·72	0·88
Cheshire	0·72	0·74	0·80
Liverpool	0·69	0·86	1·08
St. Helens and Knowsley	0·52	0·65	0·92
Sefton	0·60	0·90	1·13
Wirral	0·87	1·00	1·05
Mersey RHA	0·69	0·81	0·95
Lancashire	0·80	0·79	0·94
Bolton	0·70	0·61	0·81
Bury	0·89	0·70	1·32
Manchester	1·02	0·91	1·13
Oldham	0·45	0·57	0·83
Rochdale	1·22	1·33	1·16
Salford	0·96	1·33	1·35
Stockport	1·01	0·97	1·20
Tameside	0·54	0·72	1·21
Trafford	0·98	1·17	1·42
Wigan	0·91	0·95	1·17
North Western RHA	0·86	0·88	1·08
England	0·68	0·75	0·88

Note: The data are estimates based on a sample of prescriptions of 1 in 200 dispensed by chemists in England. The population figures used are based on the OPCS estimates of residential population for the appropriate mid-year.

Prescribing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adjudications have been considered by the independent medical adviser in each family health services authority on the financial responsibility for prescribing as between general practitioners and hospitals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There is no such formal adjudication mechanism.

Mid-Cheshire Hospital Trust

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines on nursing provision and nursing grades he has provided to the Mid-Cheshire hospital trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for the trust to develop human resource strategies to enable it to provide a high quality health service.

NHS (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of *(a)* auxiliary nursing staff, *(b)* qualified nurses and *(c)* unit managers and higher grades in the national health service are from an ethnic minority; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Blood

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many transfers of *(a)* blood and *(b)* blood products were performed by the national health service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in each year from 1978 to the latest year available;

(2) how many donations of blood were taken by the National Blood Transfusion Service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in each year from 1978 to the latest year available.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on the number of transfusions is not held centrally.

The number of donations of blood given in England and Wales since 1978 are given in the table.

Year	*Number of donations of blood*
[1]1978	2,123,607
[1]1979	2,144,484
[1]1980	2,220,036
1981	2,065,428
1982	2,058,994
1983	2,135,840
1984	2,158,626
1985	2,119,060
1986	2,128,450

Year	Number of donations of blood
1987	2,094,316
1988	2,140,810
1989	2,225,009
1990	2,180,856

[1] For the years 1977-80 figures relate to the number of donors reporting at blood transfusion centres.

Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department began to collect information on HIV/AIDS.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department first began to collect information on HIV/AIDS in 1981, when the acquired immune deficiency syndrome was recognised in the United States of America. The Public Health Laboratory Service communicable disease surveillance centre began surveillance of AIDS in 1982, shortly after the first case of AIDS was reported in the United Kingdom.

NHS (Capital Spending)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list total capital spending on the national health service each year since 1979-80 in money terms, real terms, on 1979-80, and as a real terms percentage increase or decrease on the previous year;

(2) if he will make a further statement on the projected level of capital spending on the national health service this year.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table.

Since 1978-79 we have increased capital spending by 73·1 per cent. in real terms.

Gross National Health Service capital expenditure

GDP	Cash	Year on year real terms increase	Cumulative real terms increase 1978-79
	£ million	per cent.	per cent.
1978-79	373	—	—
1979-80	417	−4·2	−4·2
1980-81	568	15·1	10·3
1981-82	693	11·3	22·7
1982-83	719	−3·1	18·9
1983-84	752	0·0	18·8
1984-85	845	7·0	27·1
1985-86	928	4·1	32·3
1985-86	1,013	—	—
1986-87	1,089	4·1	37·7
1987-88	1,129	−1·7	35·4
1988-89	1,221	0·9	36·6
1989-90	1,454	11·8	52·8
1990-91	1,603	1·6	55·3
[1]1991-92	1,912	11·5	73·1

[1] Estimated.

Notes:

Figures include trusts capital programme financed from (i) external borrowing (EFLs); and (ii) payments by health authorities for services.

Figures prior to 1985-86 have not been adjusted for the redefinition of capital.

Private Nursing Homes

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients of 65 years and over have been discharged directly to private nursing homes in the Crewe and Nantwich district health authority from NHS hospitals in each of the past five years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. J. Taylor, the chairman of Crewe health authority, for details.

Nasogastric Feeding Tubes

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to complete the consultations on the transfer to the family health services of the responsibility for the provision of nasogastric feeding tubes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is too early to say when our consultations, which will begin shortly, will be completed.

Geriatric Beds

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of geriatric beds for each district health authority for each of the last five years up to 1990-91.

Mr. Dorrell: *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The information requested is given in the table. Over the period, the number of geriatric cases treated increased nationally from 396,000 to 468,000, as a result of substantial improvements in acute care, rehabilitation and community health services.

Average daily available beds in wards for general patients elderly

	1986	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
England	54,588	53,275	51,042	48,733	45,902
Northern RHA	3,949	4,075	3,958	3,834	3,683
Hartlepool	157	158	168	166	157
North Tees	195	183	176	164	160
South Tees	312	320	290	281	244
East Cumbria	237	276	282	280	279
South Cumbria	286	291	284	270	269
West Cumbria	204	207	201	201	194

	1986	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Darlington	188	163	142	144	144
Durham	224	235	211	193	173
North West Durham	185	171	158	155	121
South West Durham	212	216	217	198	179
Northumberland	300	341	359	346	339
Gateshead	234	236	218	215	216
Newcastle	457	489	499	474	457
North Tyneside	217	209	190	183	185
South Tyneside	155	173	170	172	171
Sunderland	386	408	393	391	395
Yorkshire RHA	4,827	4,621	4,291	4,136	3,909
Hull	268	264	259	253	239
East Yorkshire	276	236	196	184	178
Grimsby	232	224	211	172	152
Scunthorpe	251	235	237	230	223
Northallerton	103	80	81	97	95
York	341	324	296	264	236
Scarborough	199	177	173	174	177
Harrogate	191	210	185	177	176
Bradford	470	436	370	368	340
Airedale	247	226	241	232	218
Calderdale	301	310	294	265	240
Huddersfield	330	339	291	273	256
Dewsbury	238	230	208	215	175
Leeds Western	492	507	490	478	442
Leeds Eastern	467	412	376	376	386
Wakefield	175	170	168	167	168
Pontefract	248	241	216	210	209
Trent RHA	5,263	5,116	4,901	4,655	4,411
North Derbyshire	359	390	405	346	333
South Derbyshire	560	548	502	452	434
Leicestershire	862	844	854	827	758
North Lincolnshire	298	293	279	262	257
South Lincolnshire	416	315	281	272	276
Bassetlaw	131	131	119	105	105
Central Nottinghamshire	383	315	331	293	282
Nottingham	610	609	580	578	572
Barnsley	272	269	274	276	273
Doncaster	344	310	293	292	283
Rotherham	277	265	265	258	250
Sheffield	752	827	717	694	588
East Anglian RHA	2,497	2,539	2,500	2,432	2,373
Cambridge	300	324	322	320	344
Peterborough	230	230	240	246	238
West Suffolk	321	310	308	308	295
East Suffolk	541	539	514	468	426
Norwich	529	560	529	505	503
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	210	214	228	222	204
West Norfolk and Wisbech	255	253	252	254	251
Huntingdon	112	108	108	109	112
North West Thames RHA	3,460	3,386	3,305	3,329	3,173
North Bedfordshire	244	245	218	257	238
South Bedfordshire	182	196	196	189	169
North Hertfordshire	202	228	216	220	203
East Hertfordshire	207	194	212	212	209
North West Hertfordshire	235	256	244	241	256
South West Hertfordshire	235	229	220	198	184
Barnet	509	552	529	524	473
Harrow	156	158	172	176	169
Hillingdon	263	266	248	246	238
Hounslow and Spelthorne	286	219	219	239	230
Ealing	158	162	164	178	131
Riverside	325	272	253	235	255
Parkside	458	409	414	414	418
North East Thames RHA	4,614	4,260	3,972	3,878	3,483
Basildon and Thurrock	282	270	273	280	285
Mid Essex	367	356	305	305	253
North East Essex	381	351	322	315	241
West Essex	296	283	253	256	214
Southend	335	302	239	222	214
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	505	516	512	457	335
Hampstead	130	129	125	131	130
Bloomsbury	247	102	100	70	76

	1986	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Islington	179	224	196	155	102
City and Hackney	304	72	72	121	149
Newham	250	280	268	273	248
Tower Hamlets	237	231	231	232	225
Enfield	230	271	248	239	209
Haringey	212	242	226	215	221
Redbridge	276	258	253	245	236
Waltham Forest	383	372	349	361	346
South East Thames RHA	3,740	3,533	3,384	3,324	3,212
Brighton	330	334	320	282	229
Eastbourne	307	271	279	249	290
Hastings	265	270	260	252	254
South East Kent	348	319	302	312	316
Canterbury and Thanet	393	301	282	307	298
Dartford and Gravesham	189	188	182	165	166
Maidstone	169	158	138	135	129
Medway	239	238	236	220	228
Tunbridge Wells	244	246	213	191	163
Bexley	130	177	167	152	138
Greenwich	317	243	214	212	189
Bromley	270	234	237	267	249
West Lambeth	163	135	138	149	142
Camberwell	188	189	172	167	164
Lewisham and North Southwark	190	230	244	263	259
South West Thames RHA	2,878	2,832	2,834	2,555	2,566
North West Surrey	188	167	205	153	157
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	218	235	186	185	174
South West Surrey	172	170	274	238	224
Mid Surrey	189	150	173	2	133
East Surrey	223	209	208	189	180
Chichester	145	92	123	129	98
Mid Downs	184	242	185	179	218
Worthing	356	420	377	357	352
Croydon	292	298	252	248	200
Kingston and Esher	175	154	235	230	231
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	263	224	141	165	166
Wandsworth	192	188	191	199	189
Merton and Sutton	282	284	286	282	244
Wessex RHA	3,433	3,203	3,022	2,923	2,780
East Dorset	690	658	627	580	583
West Dorset	286	249	241	243	238
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	475	440	442	444	441
South West Hampshire and Southampton	337	318	301	329	322
Winchester	250	233	201	192	186
Basingstoke	189	182	187	177	165
Salisbury	186	174	170	168	164
Swindon	249	229	228	204	174
Bath	624	578	500	459	378
Isle of Wight	147	143	125	127	127
Oxford RHA	1,825	2,054	1,832	1,819	1,647
East Berkshire	209	234	203	184	165
West Berkshire	310	290	296	322	328
Aylesbury Vale	135	132	127	136	124
Wycombe	190	237	241	229	205
Milton Keynes	84	88	90	87	83
Kettering	286	294	293	293	295
Northampton	298	301	286	287	220
Oxfordshire	312	477	296	282	227
South Western RHA	3,720	3,486	3,464	3,366	3,240
Bristol and Weston	163	193	172	194	206
Frenchay	447	406	405	404	396
Southmead	99	89	88	87	84
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	472	453	421	420	395
Exeter	389	398	409	369	367
North Devon	197	201	167	176	183
Plymouth	497	451	461	433	414
Torbay	267	270	253	214	221
Cheltenham	329	301	267	258	262
Gloucester	380	285	355	352	296
Somerset	479	440	466	459	417
West Midlands RHA	6,054	6,004	5,665	5,084	4,846

	1986	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Bromsgrove and Redditch	94	108	100	94	87
Herefordshire	186	180	196	176	157
Kidderminster and district	138	138	138	138	136
Worcester and district	279	246	239	239	214
Shropshire	606	492	441	321	263
Mid Staffordshire	247	239	237	240	210
North Staffordshire	634	656	644	578	643
South East Staffordshire	407	391	389	380	372
Rugby	64	49	97	82	75
North Warwickshire	88	119	131	131	131
South Warwickshire	284	277	260	245	226
Central Birmingham	233	224	216	167	162
East Birmingham	196	193	194	201	206
North Birmingham	136	136	144	158	160
South Birmingham	400	388	377	367	334
West Birmingham	482	494	428	374	341
Coventry	410	343	212	39	4
Dudley	327	326	261	220	196
Sandwell	252	260	253	245	234
Solihull	38	97	77	85	84
Walsall	217	313	269	269	286
Wolverhampton	335	335	359	335	326
Mersey RHA	3,042	2,909	2,786	2,523	2,047
Chester	243	265	249	239	206
Crewe	319	310	294	292	259
Halton	155	132	118	99	67
Macclesfield	200	274	196	157	108
Warrington	185	186	180	135	96
Liverpool	620	525	519	464	368
St. Helen's and Knowsley	270	281	277	246	192
Southport and Formby	226	209	203	178	153
South Sefton	360	296	298	286	212
Wirral	462	432	452	427	387
North Western RHA	5,161	5,128	5,001	4,747	4,406
Lancaster	209	201	202	193	189
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	445	351	468	432	409
Preston	122	130	132	129	138
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble	277	318	270	272	258
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	284	286	287	277	264
West Lancashire	132	133	129	112	78
Chorley and South Ribble	170	159	139	131	118
Bolton	329	353	318	312	283
Bury	211	203	191	192	210
North Manchester	297	285	250	232	230
Central Manchester	173	162	149	142	142
South Manchester	419	403	358	320	298
Oldham	265	248	238	208	194
Rochdale	211	193	185	183	166
Salford	329	325	320	313	290
Stockport	447	474	459	406	382
Tameside and Glossop	255	307	308	305	230
Trafford	210	219	218	223	210
Wigan	378	379	379	365	317
Special Health Authorities (SHA's)	126	128	128	128	127
The Hospital for Sick Children	0	0	0	0	0
National Hospital for Nervous Diseases	0	0	0	0	0
Moorfields Eye Hospital	0	0	0	0	0
Bethlem Royal Hospital	0	0	0	0	0
National Heart and Lung Hospitals SHA	0	0	0	0	0
The Royal Marsden Hospital	0	0	0	0	0
Hammersmith, Queen Charlotte	126	128	128	128	127
The Eastman Dental Hospital	0	0	0	0	0

Electoral Registration

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), *Official Report*, 29 January, columns 601-2, if he will list the latest estimates by the Registrar General of Populations of those aged 17 years and over, plus 63 per cent. of those aged 16 years, for each district council area and parliamentary constituency in England and Wales, together in each case with the equivalent year's electoral registration figures.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 February 1992]:* Population estimates are not available for parliamentary constituencies. The table shows local government electors on the 1991 registers (qualifying date 10 October 1990) and approximately corresponding mid-1990 estimates of resident population for each London borough and county district in England and Wales as requested.

The electorate figures include unknown numbers of legitimate dual registrations (eg. by persons with second homes and students). The resident population estimates include a proportion of those aged 15 to 19 at mid-1990, who were already 18 or would reach this age during the period when the 1991 electoral register was in use. This proportion has been calculated nationally and applied in every district. The estimates include residents who were not Commonwealth citizens or citizens of the Republic of Ireland, and persons detained in mental institutions, who are not eligible to be electors. Resident population estimates are currently based upon the 1981 census; provisional estimates for 1991 based on the 1991 census will be available in the autumn.

	Local Government Electors on the 1991 Electoral Register	*Estimated Resident Population Mid 1990*[1] *(Aged 17 and over, and 63 per cent. of those aged 16) Thousands*
England	36,272,066	38,022·2
Greater London	4,928,581	5,410·0
City of London	4,006	3·6
Barking and Dagenham	111,773	116·1
Barnet	212,462	246·3
Bexley	168,238	175·6
Brent	175,698	201·4
Bromley	230,337	243·5
Camden	123,393	152·6
Croydon	236,517	252·9
Ealing	190,036	233·1
Enfield	197,572	210·4
Greenwich	159,278	168·3
Hackney	132,520	146·9
Hammersmith and Fulham	99,156	121·5
Haringey	144,362	151·9
Harrow	146,912	152·0
Havering	181,057	186·4
Hillingdon	179,317	187·3
Hounslow	155,535	154·5
Islington	110,607	139·1
Kensington and Chelsea	85,577	108·1
Kingston upon Thames	93,495	113·1
Lambeth	169,510	184·0
Lewisham	175,012	178·3
Merton	122,035	131·6
Newham	156,711	158·1
Redbridge	174,069	189·0
Richmond upon Thames	114,602	137·3
Southwark	178,052	177·3
Sutton	126,038	135·1
Tower Hamlets	105,922	128·2
Waltham Forest	164,464	168·2
Wandsworth	195,928	208·7
Westminster, City of	108,390	149·6
Greater Manchester	1,923,185	2,037·0
Bolton	199,425	208·1
Bury	136,157	140·3
Manchester	313,258	348·8
Oldham	158,683	172·6
Rochdale	152,437	160·6
Salford	170,503	185·0
Stockport	222,145	231·6
Tameside	166,650	173·3
Trafford	166,847	171·6
Wigan	237,080	245·1
Merseyside	1,088,434	1,137·2
Knowsley	112,660	120·0
Liverpool	353,502	362·5
St. Helens	139,919	150·1
Sefton	226,439	239·4
Wirral	255,894	265·2
South Yorkshire	1,006,984	1,034·7
Barnsley	173,853	176·1
Doncaster	221,303	231·0
Rotherham	196,176	200·0
Sheffield	415,652	427·7
Tyne and Wear	875,820	897·2
Gateshead	159,311	165·2
Newcastle upon Tyne	212,058	222·1
North Tyneside	154,004	154·0
South Tyneside	123,338	124·6
Sunderland	227,109	231·3
West Midlands	1,981,324	2,050·7
Birmingham	737,092	768·5
Coventry	230,634	237·4
Dudley	242,149	246·4
Sandwell	227,217	232·5
Solihull	156,225	161·9
Walsall	200,403	207·9
Wolverhampton	187,604	196·1
West Yorkshire	1,575,622	1,625·4
Bradford	344,471	357·4
Calderdale	148,795	156·2
Kirklees	292,328	294·4
Leeds	547,627	566·4
Wakefield	242,401	250·9
Avon	725,848	764·3
Bath	63,094	68·1
Bristol	288,018	299·7
Kingswood	70,211	71·5
Northavon	100,569	107·4
Wansdyke	64,488	66·8
Woodspring	139,468	150·7
Bedfordshire	388,689	417·2
North Bedfordshire	99,727	109·2
Luton	125,563	130·5
Mid Bedfordshire	81,502	90·6
South Bedfordshire	81,897	86·8
Berkshire	547,299	592·0
Bracknell	65,458	83·3
Newbury	104,000	110·1
Reading	98,147	103·4
Slough	74,921	77·4
Windsor and Maidenhead	98,975	100·7
Wokingham	105,798	117·2
Buckinghamshire	472,986	500·1
Aylesbury Vale	108,242	115·5
South Bucks.	48,055	49·6
Chiltern	70,751	70·8
Milton Keynes	126,731	139·0
Wycombe	119,207	125·2
Cambridgeshire	490,438	520·6
Cambridge	80,525	81·9
East Cambridgeshire	46,614	48·7
Fenland	57,918	59·6
Huntingdonshire	101,517	117·4

	Local Government Electors on the 1991 Electoral Register	Estimated Resident Population Mid 1990[1] (Aged 17 and over, and 63 per cent. of those aged 16) Thousands
Peterborough	112,392	118·0
South Cambridgeshire	91,472	95·0
Cheshire	738,936	759·3
Chester	89,781	91·3
Congleton	66,035	69·8
Crewe and Nantwich	79,527	81·6
Ellesmere Port and Neston	62,469	62·1
Halton	92,391	93·6
Macclesfield	119,006	122·3
Vale Royal	88,356	89·8
Warrington	141,371	148·6
Cleveland	418,369	429·4
Hartlepool	68,737	70·2
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	111,974	112·9
Middlesbrough	105,594	108·2
Stockton-on-Tees	132,064	138·1
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	369,546	377·4
Caradon	59,697	59·9
Carrick	65·821	65,0
Kerrier	68,913	70·2
North Cornwall	57,906	59·4
Penwith	48,277	51·4
Restormel	67,216	69·8
Isles of Scilly	1,716	1·6
Cumbria	384,204	397·3
Allerdale	75,978	78·3
Barrow-in-Furness	55,976	55·8
Carlisle	79,577	83·3
Copeland	55,515	57·0
Eden	36,559	38·8
South Lakeland	80,599	84·1
Derbyshire	726,446	745·0
Amber Valley	89,819	92·2
Bolsover	55,859	57·1
Chesterfield	79,420	82·2
Derby	167,849	170·5
Erewash	81,420	85·6
High Peak	65,568	66·9
North East Derbyshire	76,694	78·1
South Derbyshire	55,690	58·3
Derbyshire Dales	54,127	54·1
Devon	784,634	834·6
East Devon	94,876	98·9
Exeter	76,510	83·3
North Devon	66,370	68·6
Plymouth	182,161	201·2
South Hams	60,439	63·2
Teignbridge	84,503	92·0
Mid Devon	49,489	50·9
Torbay	93,245	98·2
Torridge	41,173	42·4
West Devon	35,868	35·9
Dorset	523,403	541·4
Bournemouth	126,513	128·2
Christchurch	35,007	34·3
North Dorset	41,567	44·9
Poole	105,023	107·4
Purbeck	33,756	38·8
West Dorset	69,607	71·4
Weymouth and Portland	48,061	52·2
East Dorset	63,869	64·3
Durham	471,130	478·6
Chester-le-Street	41,282	42·5
Darlington	76,838	80·0
Derwentside	68,906	69·1
Durham	68,444	70·2
Easington	76,553	74·7
Sedgefield	69,666	70·5
Teesdale	19,608	20·2
Wear Valley	49,833	51·4
East Sussex	548,317	586·6
Brighton	115,897	116·7
Eastbourne	63,948	69·7
Hastings	62,700	65·7
Hove	69,218	77·3
Lewes	69,672	73·9
Rother	67,087	71·5
Wealden	99,795	111·8
Essex	1,181,144	1,222·9
Basildon	122,672	121·7
Braintree	89,757	91·7
Brentwood	55,194	56·1
Castle Point	67,319	67·1
Chelmsford	116,696	119·4
Colchester	112,556	122·7
Epping Forest	91,035	89·9
Harlow	57,244	54·8
Maldon	40,670	42·3
Rochford	58,771	58·8
Southend-on-Sea	121,058	135·3
Tendring	101,997	111·3
Thurrock	96,278	99·2
Uttlesford	49,897	52·5
Gloucestershire	410,744	425·4
Cheltenham	68,090	68·5
Cotswold	57,333	61·3
Forest of Dean	59,624	63·1
Gloucester	70,586	71·9
Stroud	85,687	88·4
Tewkesbury	69,424	72·2
Hampshire	1,189,344	1,227·1
Basingstoke and Deane	109,314	110·8
East Hampshire	77,062	81·1
Eastleigh	81,042	81·6
Fareham	77,218	81·3
Gosport	58,550	58·4
Hart	59,777	62·9
Havant	90,382	88·9
New Forest	128,305	132·2
Portsmouth	142,744	148·7
Rushmoor	55,722	65·2
Southampton	156,955	156·0
Test Valley	77,247	83·1
Winchester	75,026	76·9
Hereford and Worcester	525,167	537·2
Bromsgrove	70,916	70·9
Hereford	38,558	39·0
Leominster	31,949	32·2
Malvern Hills	68,819	70·7
Redditch	57,749	59·2
South Herefordshire	40,377	42·2
Worcester	63,582	65·4
Wychavon	79,501	81·6
Wyre Forest	73,716	76·0
Hertfordshire	744,189	784·7
Broxbourne	61,817	65·5

	Local Government Electors on the 1991 Electoral Register	*Estimated Resident Population Mid 1990[1] (Aged 17 and over, and 63 per cent. of those aged 16) Thousands*
Dacorum	**101,655**	**103·7**
East Hertfordshire	**91,671**	**96·0**
Hertsmere	**64,991**	**70·1**
North Hertfordshire	**86,393**	**89·7**
St. Albans	**96,500**	**103·7**
Stevenage	**57,514**	**58·0**
Three Rivers	**53,600**	**64·5**
Watford	**57,484**	**59·8**
Welwyn Hatfield	**72,564**	**73·7**
Humberside	**671,198**	**677·8**
Beverley	**91,553**	**94·1**
Boothferry	**50,492**	**52·6**
Cleethorpes	**53,843**	**54·3**
Glanford	**55,914**	**58·2**
Great Grimsby	**68,369**	**68·5**
Holderness	**39,031**	**41·3**
Kingston upon Hull	**198,204**	**190·0**
East Yorkshire	**67,150**	**72·6**
Scunthorpe	**46,642**	**46·0**
Isle of Wight	**101,682**	**106·2**
Medina	**56,947**	**59·1**
South Wight	**44,735**	**47·1**
Kent	**1,152,764**	**1,214·7**
Ashford	**72,144**	**76·4**
Canterbury	**98,452**	**106·0**
Dartford	**61,023**	**62·2**
Dover	**80,132**	**85·8**
Gillingham	**70,749**	**73·3**
Gravesham	**70,451**	**70·0**
Maidstone	**103,520**	**109·8**
Rochester-upon-Medway	**106,196**	**116·2**
Sevenoaks	**84,364**	**83·3**
Shepway	**63,362**	**71·9**
Swale	**88,202**	**92·6**
Thanet	**98,544**	**106·7**
Tonbridge and Malling	**78,883**	**81·2**
Tunbridge Wells	**76,742**	**79·2**
Lancashire	**1,069,037**	**1,104·2**
Blackburn	**100,588**	**102·6**
Blackpool	**111,929**	**114·3**
Burnley	**69,160**	**72·9**
Chorley	**73,495**	**76·6**
Fylde	**56,959**	**60·9**
Hyndburn	**59,316**	**61·7**
Lancaster	**100,801**	**106·9**
Pendle	**64,546**	**66·3**
Preston	**96,586**	**99·7**
Ribble Valley	**40,411**	**42·5**
Rossendale	**50,513**	**50·8**
South Ribble	**78,574**	**80·8**
West Lancashire	**83,329**	**82·5**
Wyre	**82,830**	**85·8**
Leicestershire	**671,043**	**705·5**
Blaby	**64,416**	**67·8**
Charnwood	**113,295**	**120·2**
Harborough	**52,984**	**55·9**
Hinckley and Bosworth[1]	**74,748**	**78·6**
Leicester	**202,102**	**211·6**
Melton	**35,300**	**36·3**
North West Leicestershire	**62,932**	**64·6**
Oadby and Wigston	**41,712**	**41·8**
Rutland	**23,554**	**28·8**
Lincolnshire	**457,179**	**476·6**
Boston	**42,010**	**42·5**
East Lindsey	**92,449**	**97·7**
Lincoln	**62,373**	**64·4**
North Kesteven	**62,202**	**70·5**
South Holland	**54,116**	**55·5**
South Kesteven	**84,207**	**85·2**
West Lindsey	**59,822**	**60·8**
Norfolk	**587,093**	**608·3**
Breckland	**81,738**	**84·2**
Broadland	**83,872**	**86,8**
Great Yarmouth	**68,295**	**71·4**
North Norfolk	**73,684**	**80·0**
Norwich	**94,202**	**94·3**
South Norfolk	**81,806**	**82·6**
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	**103,496**	**109·0**
Northamptonshire	**437,561**	**454·4**
Corby	**39,800**	**39·3**
Daventry	**48,022**	**50·6**
East Northamptonshire	**51,889**	**54·1**
Kettering	**58,688**	**60·4**
Northampton	**135,407**	**143·6**
South Northamptonshire	**52,079**	**53·4**
Wellingborough	**51,676**	**52·9**
Northumberland	**237,940**	**244·0**
Alnwick	**23,752**	**25·2**
Berwick-upon-Tweed	**21,645**	**21·3**
Blyth Valley	**61,324**	**62·3**
Castle Morpeth	**38,417**	**41·0**
Tynedale	**44,906**	**46·4**
Wansbeck	**47,896**	**47·8**
North Yorkshire	**555,263**	**588·2**
Craven	**40,027**	**41·7**
Hambleton	**60,925**	**64·3**
Harrogate	**112,937**	**120·3**
Richmondshire	**32,096**	**43·1**
Ryedale	**72,782**	**75·2**
Scarborough	**85,286**	**86·9**
Selby	**72,165**	**75·3**
York	**79,045**	**81·4**
Nottinghamshire	**783,869**	**809·7**
Ashfield	**85,172**	**87·6**
Bassetlaw	**81,715**	**84·4**
Broxtowe	**84,857**	**89·6**
Gedling	**86,498**	**88·9**
Mansfield	**77,685**	**79·3**
Newark and Sherwood	**80,917**	**82·3**
Nottingham	**211,014**	**215·3**
Rushcliffe	**76,011**	**82·3**
Oxfordshire	**419,418**	**461·9**
Cherwell	**83,754**	**97·5**
Oxford	**83,049**	**95·2**
South Oxfordshire	**101,660**	**103·4**
Vale of White Horse	**84,029**	**89·3**
West Oxfordshire	**66,926**	**76·6**
Shropshire	**313,773**	**320·9**
Bridgnorth	**39,292**	**41·1**
North Shropshire	**41,423**	**45·0**
Oswestry	**26,847**	**27·3**
Shrewsbury and Atcham	**72,019**	**72·4**
South Shopshire	**29,378**	**29·3**
The Wrekin	**104,814**	**105·8**
Somerset	**364,363**	**372·7**

	Local Government Electors on the 1991 Electoral Register	Estimated Resident Population Mid 1990[1] (Aged 17 and over, and 63 per cent. of those aged 16) Thousands
Mendip	74,479	75·5
Sedgemoor	76,714	78·6
Taunton Deane	74,465	77·1
West Somerset	26,660	26·8
South Somerset	112,045	114·6
Staffordshire	805,258	827·4
Cannock Chase	68,597	70·3
East Staffordshire	75,905	77·6
Lichfield	71,740	75·0
Newcastle-under-Lyme	93,028	95·1
South Staffordshire	82,926	86·6
Stafford	92,130	96·2
Staffordshire Moorlands	75,897	77·7
Stoke-on-Trent	193,580	195·8
Tamworth	51,455	53·1
Suffolk	481,020	507·0
Babergh	62,435	62·0
Forest Heath	33,744	45·4
Ipswich	89,834	89·6
Mid Suffolk	61,078	62·3
St. Edmundsbury	69,984	72·9
Suffolk Coastal	79,265	88·0
Waveney	84,680	86·8
Surrey	778,463	804·7
Elmbridge	85,289	87·0
Epsom and Ewell	49,488	55·2
Guildford	96,164	98·0
Mole Valley	63,316	61·8
Reigate and Banstead	91,642	92·9
Runnymede	57,780	58·7
Spelthorne	64,205	69·3
Surrey Heath	58,529	66·1
Tandridge	58,581	60·3
Waverley	88,778	87·7
Woking	64,691	67·7
Warwickshire	377,894	386·9
North Warwickshire	47,312	48·3
Nuneaton and Bedworth	89,859	91·9
Rugby	65,749	68·3
Stratford-on-Avon	82,926	85·8
Warwick	92,048	92·6
West Sussex	557,267	574·6
Adur	46,267	47·0
Arun	105,410	108·2
Chichester	82,015	88·3
Crawley	66,575	66·7
Horsham	84,681	86·9
Mid Sussex	94,104	95·1
Worthing	78,215	82·4
Wiltshire	429,198	443·4
Kennet	50,588	53·5
North Wiltshire	85,271	90·9
Salisbury	80,326	81·2
Thamesdown	129,123	133·1
West Wiltshire	83,890	84·7
Wales	2,206,436	2,283·2
Clwyd	321,383	327·3
Alyn and Deeside	57,171	57·4
Colwyn	44,139	45·6
Delyn	52,801	52·8
Glyndwr	33,147	33·9
Rhuddlan	44,216	45·8
Wrexham Maelor	89,909	91·8
Dyfed	273,900	283·8
Carmarthen	43,770	46·1
Ceredigion	52,863	55·4
Dinefwr	30,793	31·4
Llanelli	60,067	60·9
Preseli Pembrokeshire	53,663	55·5
South Pembrokeshire	32,744	34·4
Gwent	332,902	353·2
Blaenau Gwent	58,774	61·4
Islwyn	51,818	54·3
Monmouth	58,765	64·9
Newport	94,055	99·0
Torfaen	69,490	73·5
Gwynedd	186,841	192·8
Aberconwy	42,777	44·5
Arfon	42,533	44·3
Dwyfor	21,832	22·1
Meirionnydd	25,840	26·3
Ynys Mon (Isle of Anglesey)	53,859	55·6
Mid Glamorgan	409,510	423·2
Cynon Valley	49,999	51·1
Merthyr Tydfil	45,558	46·7
Ogwr	102,528	108·6
Rhondda	60,379	60·4
Rhymney Valley	78,200	80·3
Taff-Ely	72,846	76·2
Powys	93,064	94·5
Brecknock	32,672	33·4
Montgomeryshire	41,327	42·1
Radnorshire	19,065	19·0
South Glamorgan	302,706	319·1
Cardiff	218,591	224·9
Vale of Glamorgan	84,115	94·2
West Glamorgan	286,130	289·3
Port Talbot	40,357	38·7
Lliw Valley	49,034	50·5
Neath	51,620	51·5
Swansea	145,119	148·6

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[1] Figures may not add due to rounding.

Population Estimates Unit, OPCS.

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment (East Midlands)

15. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the east midlands have been unemployed for *(a)* more than one year and *(b)* more than five years.

Mr. Jackson: There were 38,336 claimants unemployed for over a year and 6,480 unemployed for over five years in the east midlands in October 1991. These figures are on the unadjusted basis.

Skills Audit

16. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to carry out an audit of skills among the labour force.

Mr. Howard: My Department commissions surveys to monitor skills and training issues at a national and regional level.

It is mainly a matter for training and enterprise councils to decide whether to undertake local skills audit. Several TECs are undertaking studies of that kind.

Job Creation (Hemsworth)

17. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what jobs were created in the Hemsworth constituency in each of the years from 1987 to 1991.

Mr. Jackson: No records are kept of jobs created, only estimates of the net change in the numbers of employees in employment are made.

Youth Training

18. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current annual cost of providing training for 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mr. Howard: Provision for youth training in Great Britain in 1991-92 was £842 million. Yesterday I announced plans for a further £17 million to be allocated to YT in the current financial year, as part of my Department's spring supplementary estimate.

19. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 1991 school leavers sought a place on a youth training scheme; and how many were successful.

Mr. Howard: Information about entrants to youth training is not available by reference to the date of their leaving school. The Government remain committed to their guarantee of an offer of a place on YT for all 16 and 17-year-olds not in a job or full-time education.

Training of Prisoners

20. **Mr. Leighton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what provision he has made for the training and employment of prisoners and ex-offenders.

Mr. Howard: Responsibility for training in prisons lies with the prison service. Time spent in prison counts as a period of unemployment for the purposes of qualifying within the priority groups eligible to enter employment training, which is delivered by training and enterprise councils. On employment matters, the employment service helps and advises ex-offenders through its extensive jobcentre network.

London East TEC

21. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps are being taken by London East training and enterprise council to improve awareness of its products and aims.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that London East training and enterprise council is improving awareness of its products and aims through a variety of marketing initiatives such as issuing regular newssheets and holding events for specific audiences including employers, educationalists and young people.

All TECs are required to publish summaries of their corporate plan and business plan and an annual report. They are also required to hold a public meeting once a year to inform their local community about their work.

Social Charter

22. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he intends to implement any section of the EC social charter.

Mr. Howard: The social charter, signed by the eleven other member states, was a political declaration and as such does not require implementation. Where legislation is required to implement directives agreed under the social action programme, we intend to legislate within the timetable for implementation set out in each proposal.

Foreign Tourists

23. **Sir Robert McCrindle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made of the number of foreign tourists who will visit the United Kingdom in 1992.

Mr. Forth: The British Tourist Authority's latest estimates show that it expects 18·2 million overseas visitors to the United Kingdom in 1992.

Trade Unions (Court Jurisdiction)

24. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any proposals to transfer jurisdiction over trade unions to a new court.

Mr. Forth: No.

Where trade unions act unlawfully, it should be open to bring proceedings against them before the normal courts.

Unlawful Strikes

25. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce legislation to give members of the public the right to halt unlawful strikes affecting the public services.

Mr. Forth: Yes.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made by my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Employment, to the House on 28 January, *Official Report*, columns 813-15.

Wages Councils

26. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has for the abolition of the wages councils.

Mr. Forth: The wages councils have no permanent place in the labour market and their operation remains under review.

RECHAR

27. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning the effect on employment in former coal mining areas of the hold up in payment of European RECHAR funds.

Mr. Forth: Employment issues in so far as they might affect Pontefract and Castleford were raised during the Adjournment debate on unemployment (Pontefract and Castleford), *Official Report*, 28 January 1992, column 922-28.

Unemployment (Plans)

28. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to introduce new measures to alleviate unemployment.

Mr. Jackson: On top of the job placement advice and assistance to which all unemployed people are entitled, we are offering some 840,000 places on our programmes this financial year and almost one million next year to help the unemployed back to work. This package of nationally available measures represents the most comprehensive range of practical help ever and fully meets the differing needs of all unemployed people.

Career Development Loans

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the numbers, average loan size, and costs to Government of career development loans in each standard region in 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Jackson: Information on numbers of career development loans and average loan size by region for the two years in question is given in the following tables. Statistics on the cost of the loans to Government are not available by region. The cost to Government for all career development loans in 1989-90 was £1·2 million and the cost in 1990-91 was £3·7 million.

Career development loans
Table 1
Number of loans and value of average loan by region 1989-90

Region	*Number of loans*	*Average loan £*
South East	1,467	2,878
Greater London	1,244	3,051
Scotland	839	1,848
North West	780	2,025
Yorkshire and Humberside	762	2,348
West Midlands	712	1,790
South West	658	2,529
East Midlands	462	1,983
Northern	435	2,186
East Anglia	277	2,255
Wales	268	2,184

Table 2
Number of loans and value of average loan by region 1990-91

Region	*Number of loans*	*Average loan £*
South East	2,907	2,774
Greater London	2,625	3,074
Scotland	1,644	2,452
North West	1,634	2,102
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,550	2,029
West Midlands	1,471	1,823
South West	1,287	2,690
East Midlands	953	1,951
Northern	849	2,285
East Anglia	598	2,205
Wales	508	2,218

Medical Advisory Service

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to strengthen the employment medical advisory service.

Mr. Forth: Since HSE reorganised its field-based staff in April 1990 the Employment medical advisory service has been an integral part of HSE's field operations division. Further plans to increase and broaden the impact of HSE's field force will be set out in the Health and Safety Commission's plans of work for 1992-93 and beyond, which the Commission expects to submit shortly to the Secretary of State for his approval.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each year since 1978 to the latest available date the budget allocation of staff, general administrative expenditure costs, both for each Health and Safety Executive doctorate and division, together with the number in post and the complemented figure for each inspectorate and the number of doctors and nurses in the employment medical advisory service and scientists within research and laboratory services division and medical division.

Mr. Forth: Available information is set out in the following tables. Changes in HSE's internal divisional structure and transfers of responsibilities within them mean that figures for budgets and staff are not directly comparable from year to year for divisions. Information is given from the earliest dates available.

Table 1
Health and Safety Commission/Executive
Inspectorate and Divisional Budgets for Salaries and GAE

£(000s) cash prices

Inspectorate/Division	*1986-87 Salaries*	*1986-87 GAE*	*1987-88 Salaries*	*1987-88 GAE*	*1988-89 Salaries*	*1988-89 GAE*	*1989-90 Salaries*	*1989-90 GAE*	*1990-91 Salaries*	*1990-91 GAE*	*1991-92 Salaries*	*1991-92 GAE*
HSC/E Sec[1]	501	76	808	118	896	135	1,321	225	1,481	244	1,972	336
Solicitor	316	4	354	4	363	5	396	7	519	12	627	12
Railway[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	422	43	1,465	195
Special hazards	1,880	103	1,966	126	2,125	129	2,004	183	1,857	183	2,115	230
Safety and general policy	1,397	106	1,431	106	1,817	135	1,690	120	1,951	157	2,892	237
Resources and planning	7,154	11,639	7,224	9,655	7,747	9,424	8,115	9,113	9,236	10,546	11,577	16,133
Offshore safety[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5,726	1,009
Technology	5,767	1,032	6,236	1,132	6,875	1,262	7,004	1,356	5,500	1,034	8,631	1,652
Hazardous installations policy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	619	51	626	80
Industrial air pollution[4]	1,235	271	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Field operations	21,158	9,475	22,019	10,159	24,414	10,929	25,673	11,490	37,308	12,837	41,368	15,746
Her Majesty's Mines	3,783	590	3,836	563	3,722	561	3,373	666	3,085	539	3,218	543
Her Majesty's Nuclear	3,745	474	4,821	676	5,815	755	7,377	1,246	9,394	1,379	10,446	1,500
Health policy	4,900	539	5,100	602	5,504	642	6,357	749	4,094	590	2,400	667
Research and laboratory services	6,767	3,129	7,004	2,913	7,557	2,900	7,350	3,020	7,349	3,039	8,396	3,495

Inspectorate/Division	*1986-87* *Salaries*	*GAE*	*1987-88* *Salaries*	*GAE*	*1988-89* *Salaries*	*GAE*	*1989-90* *Salaries*	*GAE*	*1990-91* *Salaries*	*GAE*	*1991-92* *Salaries*	*GAE*
Electrical equipment certification[5]	—	—	—	—	—	—	854	63	1,031	70	1,219	93
Nuclear safety research[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	253	34	226	54

[1] Includes HSE Secretariat, Commission expenses and Chairman's salary.
[2] Transferred from the Department of Transport.
[3] Transferred from the Department of Energy.
[4] Transferred to Department of Environment.
[5] Separated from the Research and Laboratory Services division.

Table 2: Staff in post in each Inspectorate since 1978 are shown below (1 April):

Year	*FAC/AGR*	*TD*	*M and Q*	*NII*	*RI*	*OSD*
1978	2087·0	—	199·0	166·5	—	—
1979	2142·5	—	195·0	126·0	—	—
1980	2168·0	—	162·0	125·0	—	—
1981	2097·5	—	167·0	133·0	—	—
1982	1908·5	—	163·5	142·0	—	—
1983	1809·5	—	159·0	152·0	—	—
1984	1796·5	—	151·5	159·0	—	—
1985	1802·0	—	142·5	156·5	—	—
1986	1472·5	[2]349·0	133·5	163·0	—	—
1987	1466·0	305·0	134·5	168·5	—	—
1988	1420·0	291·0	116·5	186·5	—	—
1989	1428·5	289·5	112·0	211·5	—	—
			MI			
1990	1490·5	304·5	[4]81·0	249·5	—	—
	[1]FOD					
1991	1797·0	[3]215·5	77·0	241·0	[5]34	[6]88
		[3]THSD				
1992 (Feb)	1859·5	314·0	67·0	264·5	53	192

[1] HSE field-based staff were reorganised with effect from 2 April 1990 to form the field operations division (FOD). From that date separate figures are not longer available for factory, agricultural and quarries inspectorates. Staff based at field consultant groups including specialist inspectors and scientists were also transferred to FOD.

[2] In April 1986 specialist inspectors including explosives inspectors who formerly worked within factory inspectorate, transferred to the newly-created technology division.

[3] In November 1991 a new division: technology and health sciences was formed incorporating the technology division.

[4] The quarries inspectorate transferred to the factory and agricultural division in October 1989.

[5] The railway inspectorate transferred to HSE from the Department of Transport in December 1990.

[6] Responsibility for offshore safety transferred to HSE from the department of Energy in April 1991.

HSE inspectorates do not have formal complements. Budgets are issued to meet staffing targets, but the actual number and grades of staff, and balance between payroll and GAE, will vary according to changes in work demands and other circumstances.

Table 3: The information requested about doctors, nurses and scientists is given below:

Year (Apr)	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Scientists*	
	Within Medical Division including EMAS			*Within RLSD*
1978	86·5	85·5	2·0	306·0
1979	86·5	91·0	8·0	307·5
1980	83·0	80·0	7·0	309·0
1981	86·0	72·0	12·0	282·0
1982	74·0	59·5	19·0	275·0
1983	73·0	60·5	19·0	298·0
1984	70·0	63·0	19·0	293·0
1985	71·5	50·5	13·0	290·0
1986	68·5	53·0	17·0	283·0
1987	64·5	49·0	21·0	280·0
1988	56·5	53·0	22·0	268·5
1989	55·0	50·5	21·5	273·5
1990	56·0	53·0	42·5	285·5
1991	56·5	53·5	50·5	245·5
(Feb) 1992	54·5	53·5	[1]11·5	253·0

[1] Following its formation the majority of scientists previously working in the health policy division (previously medical division) transferred to the technology and health sciences division.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the ways in which the employment medical advisory service intends to encourage development of occupational health services in industry.

Mr. Forth: The medical and other professional staff in the Health and Safety Executive, will continue to provide advice on the use of occupational health services in industry, organise national and local campaigns, and liaise with relevant professional bodies to encourage the development and maintenance of appropriate standards of training and qualification for occupational health service practitioners. This work is supported by a wide range of HSE publications relevant to the development of occupational health services in industry.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria are used to assess the suitability of appointed doctors; and how many doctors have had their status as appointed doctors withdrawn by employment medical advisory service; what proportion of doctors appointed by EMAS have qualifications in occupational health; how many appointed doctors are currently registered with EMAS; and how many days training, on average, each received from EMAS staff.

Mr. Forth: Doctors applying for appointment by the Health and Safety Executive's employment medical advisory service need to demonstrate interest in occupational medicine and show that they are sufficiently qualified, experienced and competent to carry out their duties. Appointments are now for five years only and automatically terminate unless reviewed. Suitability is assessed by the local senior employment medical adviser concerned, both on appointment and regularly thereafter. In 1991, 174 doctors had their appointment revoked for reasons generally of retirement, or cessation of the particular process or substance requiring appointment.

There are currently 1,340 appointed doctors registered with EMAS. Over 30 per cent. hold specialist qualifications in occupational medicine. Others have attended courses in occupational medicine which do not lead to formal qualifications, such as the Faculty of Occupational Medicine's introductory course. Each doctor is provided with induction training prior to appointment and the opportunity to attend an EMAS seminar held annually, as well as written guidance material relevant to his or her duties. Records of average training days are not maintained.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to increase the staff of the employment medical advisory service, within the health and safety executive.

Mr. Forth: Since HSE reorganised its field-based staff in April 1990 the employment medical advisory service has become an integral part of HSE's field operations division. HSE plans to increase the number of doctors and nurses working in the division by around 10 during 1992-93, from 98 in post at 1 February 1992.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the rate of doctors and nurses employed by the employment medical advisory service in relation to introduction of Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations; and what additional staff resources will be made available to effect this.

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the enforcement of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations lies with the inspectorates in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) supported by their professional colleagues who include staff of HSE's employment medical advisory service (EMAS). EMAS has been active in helping to increase awareness of the regulations and advising on the use of occupational health expertise and services. No additional EMAS resources were required specifically for the introduction of these regulations but 56 doctors have been appointed under them to conduct statutory medical examinations.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give details of the current amount of fees outstanding to the employment medical advisory service of the Health and Safety Executive for medical examinations.

Mr. Forth: On 31 January 1992, £10,339 was outstanding for medical examinations carried out by the employment medical advisory service.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will update the 1976 employment medical advisory service survey on the number of physicians and nurses employed in industry who have specialist qualifications in occupational health; and what action has been taken by the Health and Safety Executive on proposals presented in the 1976 EMAS document "Occupational Health Services—The Way Ahead."

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive has recently commissioned a survey of occupational health provision in industry which will provide information on the number of physicians, nurses and other professional staff in industry with specialist qualifications in occupational health. The results of the survey should be available by the autumn.

The 1976 EMAS document, "Occupational Health Services—The Way Ahead", made recommendations relating to epidemiological work, statutory medical examinations, and the provision and operation of occupational health services in relation to occupational medical and nursing input. Progress has been made in all these areas as a result of action taken by the Health and Safety Executive and by the professional bodies concerned.

The Health and Safety Commission followed up this work by issuing in 1986 a statement of its policy on the development of occupational health services and launching a programme of action to promote the use of occupational health services by employers commensurate with the health hazards and risks in their undertakings. Further impetus was provided by new statutory requirements on health surveillance, particularly the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988. In indicating the current extent of occupational health provision in industry, the survey now commissioned will help the Health and Safety Commission and Executive evaluate the impact of these developments and further develop their policy and programmes on occupational health.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff were employed by the Health and Safety Executive employment medical advisory service in each year since 1979 to the latest date for which figures are available, broken down by occupation and location; and how many posts are currently vacant.

Mr. Forth: An analysis by occupation and location of staff working in the employment medical advisory service (EMAS) is given in the following tables for each year from 1988. EMAS was reorganised with effect from April 1988, from a regional, to an area structure. Comparable figures for earlier years are not available.

On 1 February 1992 there were 11·5 vacant posts in EMAS.

Fire Safety Certificates

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many premises subject to the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1984 had yet to be issued with a fire safety certificate on 1 February in each Health and Safety Executive area.

Mr. Forth: Information about the number of premises subject to the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984 which have not yet been issued with a fire certificate under the Fire Certification (Special Premises) Regulations 1976 is not readily available centrally. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HSE does not hold information about premises for which the responsibility for issuing a fire certificate rests with local fire authorities.

Occupational Diseases

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people died from occupational diseases in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Forth: Figures for deaths due to asbestosis, mesothelioma and other industrial diseases, taken from the latest published statistics ("Health and Safety Statistics 1989-90"), are given in the table.

	Asbestosis	*Mesothelioma*	*Other*
1980	102	458	697
1981	137	472	633
1982	128	504	624
1983	121	573	655
1984	129	624	531
1985	140	615	587
1986	166	702	524
1987	144	808	484
1988	152	860	—
1989	145	853	—

For asbestosis and mesothelioma the numbers are taken from death certificates mentioning either of these conditions. An estimated 100 mesotheliomas annually are not asbestos-related. For other diseases the numbers are for individual awards of death benefit under the industrial injuries scheme (excluding those for asbestosis and mesothelioma) up to the discontinuation of this benefit in April 1988. These figures exclude asbestos-related lung cancers, which are estimated to be about twice as numerous as mesotheliomas.

EMAS Staff at 1 April 1988 by Occupational Group and Location

Areas	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Others*[1]	*Total*
South West	5·0	3·0	3·5	11·5
South	1·0	2·0	1·5	4·5
South East	1·0	1·0	1·5	3·5
London North	2·0	2·0	3·0	7·0
London South	1·5	2·0	2·5	6·0
East Anglia	2·0	1·0	1·0	4·0
Northern Home Counties	2·0	1·0	2·5	5·5
East Midlands	1·5	2·0	1·5	5·0
West Midlands	5·0	3·0	3·0	11·0
Wales	3·5	3·0	3·0	9·5
Marches	2·0	2·0	2·0	6·0
North Midlands	1·5	2·0	0·5	4·0
South Yorkshire and Humberside	1·0	3·0	1·5	5·5
West and North Yorkshire	1·5	2·0	2·0	5·5
Greater Manchester	3·5	2·0	2·0	7·5
Merseyside	1·5	2·0	1·5	5·0
North West	2·0	3·0	1·0	6·0
North East	3·5	5·0	3·5	12·0
Scotland East	4·5	3·0	4·0	11·5
Scotland West	1·0	3·0	2·0	6·0

[1] Administrative and support staff.

EMAS Staff at 1 April 1989 by Occupational Group and Location

Areas	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Others*[1]	*Total*
South West	4·0	3·0	2·5	9·5
South	2·0	1·0	1·5	4·5
South East	1·0	2·0	1·5	4·5
London North	2·5	2·0	3·5	8·0
London South	1·0	2·0	2·0	5·0
East Anglia	2·0	2·0	2·0	6·0
Northern Home Counties	2·0	1·0	2·0	5·0
East Midlands	1·5	2·0	1·5	5·0
West Midlands	3·0	2·0	2·0	7·0
Wales	3·0	3·0	3·0	9·0
Marches	2·0	2·0	2·0	6·0
North Midlands	1·5	2·0	1·0	4·5
South Yorkshire and Humberside	1·0	3·0	1·5	5·5
West and North Yorkshire	2·5	2·0	2·0	6·5
Greater Manchester	3·5	2·0	2·0	7·5
Merseyside	1·5	2·0	1·5	5·0
North West	2·0	3·0	1·5	6·5
North East	3·0	5·0	3·0	11·0
Scotland East	3·5	2·5	3·0	9·0
Scotland West	2·5	2·0	1·0	5·5

[1] Administrative and support staff.

EMAS Staff at 1 April 1990 by Occupational Group and Location

Areas	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Others*[1]	*Total*
South West	4·0	4·0	3·0	11·0
South	2·0	2·0	1·5	5·5
South East	1·0	2·0	1·0	4·0
London North	1·0	2·0	2·5	5·5
London South	2·0	1·0	1·5	4·5
East Anglia	2·5	0·5	2·0	5·0
Northern Home Counties	2·0	—	2·0	4·0
East Midlands	2·5	2·0	1·5	6·0
West Midlands	3·0	3·0	3·0	9·0
Wales	3·0	4·0	3·0	10·0
Marches	2·0	2·0	2·0	6·0
North Midlands	1·5	2·0	1·0	4·5
South Yorkshire and Humberside	1·0	3·0	1·5	5·5
West and North Yorkshire	3·5	1·0	1·0	5·5
Greater Manchester	1·5	2·0	2·5	6·0
Merseyside	1·5	2·0	1·5	5·0
North West	2·0	2·0	2·5	6·5
North East	4·0	5·0	3·0	12·0
Scotland East	3·5	4·0	2·0	10·5
Scotland West	2·5	4·0	1·5	8·0

[1] Administrative and support staff.

EMAS staff at 1 April 1991 by occupational group and location

Areas	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Total*
South West	4·0	3·0	7·0
South	3·0	2·0	5·0
South East	2·0	2·0	4·0
London North	1·5	3·0	4·5
London South	1·0	1·0	2·0
East Anglia	3·0	0·5	3·5
Northern Home Counties	2·0	1·0	3·0
East Midlands	2·5	2·0	4·5
West Midlands	2·0	3·0	5·0
Wales	2·0	4·0	6·0
Marches	2·0	—	2·0
North Midlands	1·5	2·0	3·5
South Yorkshire and Humberside	2·0	2·0	4·0
West and North Yorkshire	2·5	2·0	4·5
Greater Manchester	3·5	2·0	5·5
Merseyside	1·5	2·0	3·5
North West	2·0	3·0	5·0
North East	3·0	5·0	8·0
Scotland East	3·5	4·0	7·5
Scotland West	2·5	3·0	5·5

Note EMAS became an integral part of HSEs field operations division (FOD) from 2 April 1990. From that date administrative and other field-based support staff were no longer specifically allocated to EMAS, but to FOD itself.

EMAS staff at 1 February 1992 by occupational group and location

Areas	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Total*
South West	3·0	3·0	6·0
South	3·0	2·0	5·0
South East	3·0	2·0	5·0

Areas	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Total*
London North	2·5	3·0	5·5
London South	2·0	2·0	4·0
East Anglia	2·0	1·5	3·5
Northern Home Counties	2·0	1·0	3·0
East Midlands	2·5	2·0	4·5
West Midlands	2·0	3·0	5·0
Wales	2·0	4·0	6·0
Marches	2·0	2·0	4·0
North Midlands	2·5	2·0	4·5
South Yorkshire and Humberside	2·0	1·0	3·0
West and North Yorkshire	2·5	2·0	4·5
Greater Manchester	2·5	2·0	4·5
Merseyside	2·5	2·0	4·5
North West	2·0	3·0	5·0
North East	3·0	5·0	8·0
Scotland East	4·0	3·0	7·0
Scotland West	2·5	3·0	5·5

Note. EMAS became an integral part of HSEs field operations division (FOD) from 2 April 1990. From that date administrative and other field-based staff were no longer specifically allocated to EMAS. but to FOD itself.

Skilled Building Operatives

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has plans to discuss with the Construction Industry Training Board the numbers of skilled building operatives likely to be available in the medium and long term.

Mr. Jackson: Both my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State, and I meet the chairman of the Construction Industry Training Board from time to time to discuss matters relating to the industry, including manpower issues. The last such meeting took place in November. No date has yet been set for our next meeting.

Retirement Employment

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people above retirement age are estimated to be in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The available estimates from the labour force survey show that in Great Britain in the spring of 1990, 208,000 people above state pension age were in full-time employment and 556,000 in part-time employment. Older people both above and below state pension age can bring valuable qualities of skill, experience and reliability to a job. The Government encourage people to continue working beyond pension age if they wish, and from October 1989 pensioners' earnings have had no effect on their state pension entitlement.

Income Statistics

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people, and on average by how much earn less than £3.40 per hour in each constituency of Merseyside and in the constituencies of Ellesmere Port and Neston; Chester; Warrington, South; Halton; and Lancashire, West.

Mr. Forth: The information available from the 1991 new earnings survey closest to that requested is given in the table. Information is not available for individual constituencies.

Employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence
Percentage whose gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) were below the following specified amounts
April 1991

	£2·00	*£2·50*	*£3·00*	*£3·40*
Merseyside				
Full-time				
Men	0·2	0·5	3·0	5·7
Women	0·7	2·3	7·4	14·8
Part-time				
Men	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Women	1·9	5·7	17·6	43·2
Cheshire				
Full-time				
Men	0·2	0·7	2·4	4·7
Women	[2]—	1·3	7·2	14·7
Part-time				
Men	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Women	2·5	5·6	21·6	44·9
Lancashire				
Full-time				
Men	[2]—	0·6	2·6	6·7
Women	0·3	2·1	10·0	19·5
Part-time				
Men	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Women	1·8	4·7	19·7	43·5

Source:
New Earnings Survey.

[1] — Denotes information not available.

[2] — Denotes sampling error too large or sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Note:
It is estimated that around one fifth of part-time women employees were not covered by the survey because their gross weekly earnings were below the PAYE threshold.

Woollen Textile Industry

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of redundancies notified to his Department from the woollen textile industry for 1991 in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside and *(b)* Bradford travel-to-work area.

Mr. Forth: In 1991, the Department received advance notification for 1,891 redundancies in the textile industry (SIC 43) in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Information is not available for the woollen textile industry, nor for Bradford travel-to-work area.

Training Schemes

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employment action places are currently filled in Scotland.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available data is for 9 January 1992 and showed 381 people in Scotland receiving employment action allowances on that date.

Training Credits

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the total number of young people in training under the training credits system by training and enterprise council or local enterprise company and by standard occupational classification at the most recent convenient date.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 6 February 192]*: At 8 December 1991, the latest date for when information is available, it is estimated that there were over 14,000 young people in training in England and Wales using training credits. The following table shows the figures by pilot area. Figures by standard occupational classification are not yet available.

Training credits—England and Wales
In training: provisional estimates[1]*—8 December 1991*

TEC area	*Number*
Birmingham	2,300
Bradford	1,600
Devon and Cornwall	4,100
Hertfordshire	1,000
Kent	300
North East Wales	400
Northumberland	1,300
South and East Cheshire	1,000
SOLOTEC	800
Suffolk	1,300
England and Wales	14,100

[1] Figures subject to adjustment.
Source: OSMOSIS.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Turkeys

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has concerning the extent of pododermatitis in turkeys; and what advice his Department gives for the eradication of this ailment.

Mr. Maclean: As pododermatitis is not a notifiable disease, there is no comprehensive information on its prevalence in turkeys. Pododermatitis is the result of a complex interaction of factors such as water spillage, ventilation, insulation, diet, litter quality and depth and stocking density. Advice on these factors is available in the Government's welfare code on turkeys. Ministry sponsored research has made a substantial contribution to the understanding of the condition and technical advice to overcome the problem is available from the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service.

Poultry De-beaking

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about the numbers or proportions of turkey poults which are subject to de-beaking; what guidelines he has issued to the turkey rearing industry; and what action his Department takes to ensure proper supervision of this practice.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that the proportion of turkeys which are beak trimmed in this country has fallen to under 20 per cent. Advice on beak trimming is contained in the Government's welfare code on turkeys, which states that beak trimming should be carried out only by a skilled operator or under his supervision.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take to respond to the Farm Animal Welfare Council recommendation that legislation be introduced banning the routine non-therapeutic de-beaking of poultry.

Mr. Maclean: We shall be consulting interested organisations on the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of laying hens in colony systems. The Government will respond to the council's recommendations once all the comments received have been considered.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Department has a large number of information systems in use. A central record of the functions of these systems is being set up, but is still in its early stages and it is not possible to provide the required information on the data systems or on any links with other systems until this work is complete. All systems containing details of individuals are registered under the Data Protection Act. There are 37 such registrations covering approximately 850 sub-systems, all of which comply fully with the requirements of the Act. None is linked to the police national computer.

Dumped Mackerel

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received regarding large quantities of dumped mackerel being trawled in the south west mackerel box; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I have received five letters.

A pelagic fishery for species other than mackerel is permitted in the mackerel box and only 15 per cent. of the total quantity of the catch retained may be mackerel taken as a by-catch. Our sea fisheries inspectorate vigorously monitors the activities inside the box. The situation is kept under close scrutiny.

Kingswear, South Devon (Moorings)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet the hon. Member for South Hams and the Dart harbour and navigation authority before making a final decision on the scheme to provide piled pontoon moorings at Kingswear, south Devon, submitted by the authority in February 1989.

Mr. Curry: I do not believe that a meeting will be necessary. The application was not complete when formally submitted for approval on 2 December 1991, but the Department is now in the process of examining further information submitted by the Dart harbour and navigation authority and by its consultants, as well as the authority's request dated 4 February 1992 for increased costs to be taken into consideration. Our officials should shortly be in a position to let the authority have a decision on the application for approval.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in north Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

Mr. Curry: In 1991, payments to farmers in north Yorkshire under the various agricultural and horticultural schemes amounted to over £19 million, of which over £14 million was paid under the hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme, the suckler cow and the sheep annual premium schemes. A United Kingdom national harbour improvement grant of £65,127 was made to Scarborough borough council for the construction of a new fish market at Scarborough.

Since 1979, to enable farmers to diversify and to increase the level of care for the environment, the Department has introduced the farm and conservation grant scheme, the farm woodland scheme, the environmentally sensitive areas scheme, the five-year and one-year set-aside schemes and two pilot extensification schemes. In 1991 in north Yorkshire, over 54 hectares of new woodland planting was approved under the farm woodland scheme. The Pennine dales ESA has been successful in maintaining and enhancing the landscape and wildlife quality of the area. During 1991, the total area set aside under either the five-year or one-year set-aside schemes increased to 3,705 hectares.

In 1991, the Department spent £562,000 on building maintenance and on new facilities and specialised accommodation in north Yorkshire. It also decided to relocate the central science laboratory to Sand Hutton and to relocate 600 headquarters posts to York. It is expected that some 350 to 400 posts will be recruited locally as a result, and the moves can be expected to provide a boost to the local economy.

Data for the period June 1979 to May 1980 cannot be provided without disproportionate cost.

Abattoirs

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what *(a)* United Kingdom and *(b)* EEC grant aid is available in non-assisted areas of the United Kingdom to help bring abattoirs up to the standard required by the EEC regulation; and what is the comparable position with regard to availability of such grants on *(a)* France, *(b)* Holland, *(c)* Belgium and *(d)* Germany.

Mr. Maclean: My Department does not give grants for this purpose. Grants are available to meet priorities which we have agreed with the European Commission under EC regulation 866/90. This scheme also operates in France, Netherlands, Belgium and Germany and grants are available according to the investment priorities agreed between the European Commission and the national authorities in those member states. In France, Belgium and some parts of Germany grants are available under this scheme for slaughterhouse modernisation.

BSE

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the locations of refrigerated containers dedicated for the use of bovine spongiform encephalopathy carcases and controlled and monitored by his Ministry outside the south-west of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: In addition to those listed in my reply to the hon. Member on 23 January, *Official Report*, col. 289, refrigerated containers are used at the incineration plants in Dyfed, Clywd and Hertfordshire.

Industrial Trawlers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the annual catch of industrial trawlers in the North sea last year; the main species concerned and the estimated by-catch.

Mr. Curry: The provisional catch figure for industrial landings by all countries from the North sea during 1990 is 1,003,000 tonnes of which the main species were sandeel and Norway pout with some herring, blue whiting and sprat. The by-catch of haddock, whiting and saithe was 57,000 tonnes.

Source: Report of the Advisory Committee on Fishery Management of the International Council for the Exploration of The Sea, May 1991.

Preliminary figures for 1991 indicate a catch of just over 300,000 tonnes by EC countries. Figures for non-member states are not yet available.

Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will give details of how he intends to allot the extra £16·5 million in compensatory allowances payable on hill sheep and cattle in the 1992-93 scheme year.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to the reply, 14 November 1991, c. 621]:* I am pleased to be able to announce that United Kingdom Agriculture Ministers have completed the autumn review of economic conditions in the hills and uplands and our consideration of responses to the consultation document "Environmental Aspects of Support for Hill Farming" which was issued for comment on 13 November 1991.

The review has shown that the average net farm income of livestock producers in the United Kingdom's hill and upland areas is forecast to rise in 1991-92 following significant falls in the previous two years. There will be a further increase following the exceptional additional payment of nearly £12 million in suckler cow premium, which I announced today, since over two thirds of this will go to hill farmers. After careful consideration we have concluded that, subject to parliamentary approval, the rates of HLCA per animal should be maintained at the 1991 level but the financial ceilings per hectare should be raised. This will particularly assist those producers—mainly of cattle—who did not fully benefit from last year's substantial (14 per cent.) increase in headage rates. The headage rates and financial ceilings for the 1992 scheme will thus be:

	Severely disadvantaged area (SDA) £	*Disadvantaged area (DA)* £
Cows	63·30	31·65
Hardy breed ewes	8·75	n/a
Other ewes	4·90	2·45
Financial ceiling (per hectare)	[1]81·13	[2]60·85

[1] Previously 62·48 per hectare.
[2] Previously 46·86 per hectare.

The additional payment limits of 1·4 livestock units per hectare and of six ewes per hectare (SDA) or nine ewes per hectare (DA) remain unchanged.

The raising of the financial ceilings will add £2·5 million to the cost of the scheme bringing the estimated value of payments to hill farmers in a full scheme year to £148·5 million.

My right hon. Friends and I have considered carefully the many responses to our consultation documentation "Environmental Aspects of Support for Hill Farming". The responses demonstrated widespread support for our intention to tackle the problems that have been associated with increased livestock numbers in some parts of the less favoured areas (LFA). We have concluded that the measures proposed in the consultation document are well balanced and are recognised as making an important contribution to the upland environment.

We propose therefore to introduce these measures as follows:

the new environmentally sensitive areas announced on 20 November situated in hill areas in England and Wales will be introduced during 1992 and 1993. New ESAs within the LFA will also be designated in Scotland and Northern Ireland. They will help farmers to conserve and enhance the landscape and wildlife characteristics of these areas;

a voluntary code of good upland management will be published and sent to each HLCA claimant this spring;

the HLCA regulations will be reinforced this year by a specific definition of overgrazing, designed to enable problems to be tackled more effectively on any vegetation type in any part of the LFA. This measure will be further strengthened by unused common land grazing rights in England and Wales no longer being re-allocated for HLCA purposes where overgrazing is found to be occurring;

it remains our intention to scale SDA sheep headage rates if these are adjusted in the future. Many respondents to the consultation stressed the close links between this proposal and the negotiations on GATT and CAP reform, particularly as regards the ewe premium. Unfortunately, the outcome of these negotiations remains unclear and the impact of scaling HLCA rates is correspondingly uncertain. It would therefore be premature to introduce scaling in the 1992 scheme. Scaling will in future be considered in the context of the autumn review, the precise arrangements being dependent on the resources available at the time. We will of course continue in the negotiations on CAP reform to press for the closer integration of environmental considerations into the common agricultural policy where practical and cost effective.

We intend to lay regulations before Parliament very shortly which will implement in Great Britain the rates and scheme conditions I have outlined. We are also taking the opportunity to consolidate and refine the current regulations. The new regulations will in particular make the provisions governing the eligibility of cattle and sheep consistent with one another and will include an amendment to the power of entry for inspectors to align it with the powers provided in both the suckler cow and the sheep annual premium regulations. Parallel regulations will be introduced in Northern Ireland.

My colleagues and I recognise the importance of these payments to producers particularly in easing their winter cash flow problems. Top priority will be given in the next couple of months to processing the HLCA payments, although this may mean that it will take a little longer to pay other grants, at least in England. Payable orders for HLCAs should start to be dispatched within the next fortnight to those producers whose claims have been lodged and accepted by local offices.

Beef Producers

Sir John Farr: Asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new measures he is taking to improve returns to specialist beef producers.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to the reply, 6 February 1992, column 272]:* I am very glad to announce an exceptional payment of nearly £12 million to support specialist beef producers. As a consequence the amount of suckler cow premium paid under the 1991 scheme will rise from £74 million to over £85 million. This will be achieved by raising the premium from £51·69 per cow to £59·64 in the less favoured areas, and from £47·43 per cow to £55·38 elsewhere.

This is a significant increase in support for the suckler cow heard. These increases follow the decision of the Council of Agriculture Ministers to increase the minimum and maximum rates of premium which member states may pay under the 1991 scheme. The rates announced in October were already well above the new minimum rate agreed by the Council. We have nevertheless decided that the rates of premium in the United Kingdom should be increased. This is further evidence of the Government's continuing commitment to promoting quality beef production from the suckler cow herd.

SCOTLAND

Employment Grant Scheme

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the operation of the employment grant scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: None. The hon. Member may care to note that there is no central Government scheme of this title.

Radiation, Holy Loch

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report,* column *503,* if he will identify the source of the radiation burst recorded at Holy Loch on 14 August 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* It is not possible to identify the source of the two higher than normal radiation readings recorded at Holy Loch on 14 August 1991. I should emphasise the point made in my reply of 12 December 1991 that a local transient increase of this magnitude is not of radiological significance.

District Nurses

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, by health authority, the number of full-time equivalent district nursing posts and the number of potential elderly domiciliary clients, as defined by the Department of the Environment under section 80 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, for 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* The number (whole-time equivalent) of district nurses in post is given in table 1. This table also shows nurses whose duties were a combination of two or three of the following: health visiting, district nursing and midwifery. Numbers of potential elderly domiciliary clients are not available, however table 2 shows the populations of those 65 and over.

Table 1

District nursing staff: whole time equivalent: by health board; as at September

	1976			*1981*			*1986*			*1991*[2]		
	District Nurse[1]	*Combined Duty*	*Total*	*District Nurse*	*Combined Duty*	*Total*	*District Nurse*	*Combined Duty*	*Total*	*District Nurse*	*Combined Duty*	*Total*
Scotland	1,209·0	877·0	2,086·0	1,732·4	699·7	2,432·1	1,940·7	647·6	2,588·3	1,712·6	564·8	2,277·4
Argyll and Clyde	86·0	71·0	157·0	153·1	56·8	219·9	175·8	44·4	220·2	167·0	59·9	215·9
Ayrshire and Arran	36·0	72·0	108·0	73·1	63·1	136·2	109·8	21·5	131·3	131·0	1·0	132·0
Borders	9·0	24·0	33·0	17·1	26·5	43·6	13·8	52·9	66·7	6·0	46·9	52·9
Dumfries and Galloway	24·0	49·0	73·0	28·5	44·4	72·9	43·0	38·8	81·8	37·3	42·7	80·0
Fife	81·0	16·0	97·0	140·7	11·0	151·7	162·5	—	162·5	123·0	—	121·0
Forth Valley	45·0	63·0	108·0	48·4	77·7	126·1	87·9	75·8	163·7	126·4	18·6	145·0
Grampian	125·0	96·0	221·0	182·7	83·3	266·0	203·3	77·5	280·8	141·1	77·8	221·9
Greater Glasgow	358·0	22·0	380·0	178·0	4·0	482·0	469·9	—	469·9	384·2	19·6	403·8
Highland	22·0	194·0	216·0	52·9	131·6	184·5	52·1	118·6	180·7	47·6	126·9	176·5
Lanarkshire	133·0	71·0	204·0	163·1	78·0	241·1	233·0	60·0	293·0	195·0	39·1	234·1
Lothian	210·0	38·0	248·0	243·0	12·4	255·4	238·3	18·4	256·7	227·6	1·5	229·1
Orkney	11·0	15·0	26·0	24·5	3·0	27·5	12·5	17·6	30·1	12·1	18·8	30·9
Shetland	6·0	17·0	23·0	4·5	19·0	23·5	5·0	23·5	28·5	7·5	19·1	26·6
Tayside	63·0	77·0	140·0	111·8	48·1	159·9	121·2	57·8	179·0	111·8	59·0	170·8
Western Isles	—	52·0	52·0	1·0	40·8	41·8	2·6	40·8	43·4	—	33·9	33·9

Table 2

Estimated home population: age 65 and over; by health board; as at 30 June

	1976	*1981*	*1986*	[1]*1990*
Scotland	698,149	726,604	742,568	761,399
Argyll and Clyde	56,873	59,972	61,873	63,278
Ayrshire and Arran	48,452	52,520	54,377	56,818
Borders	17,718	18,755	18,855	19,421
Dumfries and Galloway	20,987	22,877	24,154	25,624
Fife	44,685	48,949	50,413	52,805
Forth Valley	32,992	35,436	37,296	39,317
Grampian	66,016	68,886	69,309	71,723
Greater Glasgow	152,586	146,411	146,652	143,938
Highland	25,175	27,935	28,146	29,676
Lanarkshire	55,873	61,186	65,364	69,049
Lothian	104,046	106,999	109,641	111,433
Orkney	2,933	3,213	3,224	3,229
Shetland	3,040	3,247	3,132	3,117
Tayside	60,818	64,352	64,488	66,360
Western Isles	5,955	5,866	5,644	5,611

[1] Latest available estimates.

Scottish Universities (Irish Students)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students from the Republic of Ireland are presently receiving their higher education at each university in Scotland; and what is the estimated contribution of his Department towards their tuition fees.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* In academic year 1991-92 there were in total 307 students from the Republic of Ireland attending higher education courses at universities in Scotland. Information on the numbers attending individual universities is not available centrally. In 1991-92, the cost to the Scottish Office education department of paying tuition fees on behalf of the Irish full-time undergraduates is approximately £454,000, assuming that they are all eligible for such payments.

Fines

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he will take to introduce day or unit fines in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* My right hon. Friend will consider the case for unit fines in Scotland further in the light of experience of the statutory scheme to be introduced in England and Wales under the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the initiatives taken by his Department to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and indicate the estimated reduction for each initiative by *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2005.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on Thursday 6 February 1992 by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment at column *231*.

Recycling

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all measures undertaken by his Department to achieve the target set for the proportion of household waste to be recycled by 2000; and what is the estimated impact of each measure.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* I refer the hon. Member to the document, "This Common Inheritance—the First Year Report", published in September 1991. Since then the Government have published a report on deposit and refund systems for beverage containers and batteries and have commissioned a major study of economic instruments necessary to encourage the recovery of resources from waste. We are also considering whether any special study of the Scottish situation is required. These reports, together with the recycling plans which are now being prepared by every waste collection authority in Scotland, will enable us to assess the extent of any further action that we will need to take.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *630*, what is the estimated outturn expenditure for 1991-92 by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board on compensation to victims of crimes of violence in Scotland; and how many victims received compensation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* It is estimated that outturn expenditure by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board on compensation to victims of crimes of violence in Scotland will be of the order of £14 million in 1991-92, but an estimate of the number of victims who will receive compensation is not yet available. In 1990-91 £12·5 million was paid to 4,845 victims in Scotland.

Ferry Services (Orkney and Shetland)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations his Department has made to the European Commission regarding the inclusion of ferry services to Orkney and Shetland within the ambit of community assistance under the European regional development fund; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* As I have made clear previously, the Government are willing to consider alternative arrangements for financial support for ferry services to Orkney and Shetland, including the possibility of attracting additional European Community funding. As yet, however, we have received no specific proposals for alternative financial arrangements. My Department discussed in December of last year with Orkney and Shetland islands councils the possibility of commissioning a study into alternative arrangements for financial support for ferry services.

Mink

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) on how many occasions in 1990 and 1991 his inspectors supervised, examined or monitored the slaughter of factory farm mink by injection or gassing;

(2) if he will outline the methods of gassing used to kill mink observed by his inspectors during visits to fur factory farms in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* A member of the state veterinary service observed the one gassing session used on a mink farm in Scotland in 1990. This was carried out by means of an internal combustion engine bubbling a mixture of carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide through a purification chamber into a wooden box into which mink were inserted. The one other mink farm uses the injection method, but was not observed in operation.

Ewes

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has of the number of flocks of 1,000 ewes or more in each regional and islands area of Scotland in 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* The information requested is given in the following table:

	Flocks of 1,000 ewes or more
Borders	143
Central	44
Dumfries and Galloway	108
Fife	4
Grampian	14
Highland	82
Lothian	22
Strathclyde	147
Tayside	79
Orkney	4
Shetland	9
Western Isles	6
Scotland	659

Source: Agricultural Census: June 1990.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 February 1992

ENVIRONMENT

Golf Courses

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce regulations or issue advice to local councils, restricting the proliferation of golf courses on green belt in environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Yeo: Advice on golf courses is contained in planning policy guidance notes 17 and 7 published in September 1991 and January 1992 respectively. These supplement the longstanding advice on development in green belts in planning policy guidance note 2. Golf courses should be located and designed to ensure harmony with the surrounding countryside and to conserve the natural environment. Local planning authorities should take special care when considering applications in green belts.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The information asked for is not readily available. However, my Department has a number of computer links with other organisations. None of these is with the police national computer; nor are there any plans for such links. More than 100 systems hold personal information and are registered under the Data Protection Act.

Council Tax (Information)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that council tax information, intended to be made public, cannot be combined with personalised information held in other publicly held information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The only council tax information to be publicly available will be the valuation list. This will contain only property information, such as the address and valuation band. It will contain no personal information, and will not be available for sale.

Barkby Thorpe

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the inspectors report into the Barkby Thorpe, Leicester inquiry.

Mr. Yeo: The inspector is preparing his report and will submit it to the Secretary of State as soon as possible. I shall ensure that the hon. Member receives a copy of the Secretary of State's decision when it is available.

Poll Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cumulative poll tax charge for a person living in Nottinghamshire since its inception; and what is his estimate of the approximate cost per head of its collection.

Mr. Key: The aggregate of the headline community charges for 1990-91 and 1991-92 for Nottingham is £685. The cumulative cost per chargepayer charged to revenue account of preparation for and collection of the charge in 1989-90 to 1991-92 in Nottingham is estimated to be £28·20.

Housing Associations

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent by housing associations in Darlington since 1979; and how many units of housing this has provided.

Mr. Yeo: The distribution of resources to housing associations among local authority areas is a matter for the Housing Corporation. I have therefore asked the corporation to reply direct to my hon. Friend with the information he has requested. A copy of the reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ozone Layer

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will seek a meeting of the Montreal protocol signatories to discuss the latest reports about the depletion of the ozone layer; what consideration he has given to an earlier phasing out of chlorofluorocarbons because of their known effect on the layer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional action he is taking to prevent further depletion of the ozone layer.

Mr. Trippier: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Member to the answer I gave yesterday, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) [*Official Report* column *430*].

Victoria and Albert Museum

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the trustees of the Victoria and Albert museum concerning the financing of the proposed Victoria and Albert of the North in Bradford; what views have been expressed by the trustees over the availability of £8 million from the European regional development fund; when he intends to take a final decision on the application for city grant for the project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: My Department has received representations on behalf of the Victoria and Albert museum about the possibility of a grant from the European regional development fund for the proposed Victoria and Albert of the North at Listers Mill. There are a number of major requirements which would need to be met before such a project could be regarded as viable and eligible for ERDF support. These include the means of funding the £13 million non-grant capital cost of the scheme and the projected annual revenue deficit, the practicality of undertaking the works within the Bradford ERDF programme time scale and resources, and meeting public expenditure requirements.

A city grant application for redevelopment of another part of the Listers Mill complex has also been submitted and is under consideration. A conditional grant offer of £10 million was made last year to give the parties time to assemble a credible development package.

Housing (Bradford)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will approve additional financial allocations to Bradford council to build homes for rent and to repair and improve council housing stock; and if he will increase improvement grant to improve private property in the district.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities' housing investment programme—HIP—allocations for 1992-93 were announced on 16 December. Part of these resources, the housing annual capital guideline—is directed at meeting general needs in the authority, including the repair and improvement of its own stock. Our policy is well established that the building of new social housing is mainly the responsibility of housing associations, with local authorities assuming an enabling role.

Authorities' HIP allocations also contain a guideline figure for resources for private sector renewal. Authorities may claim in excess of this figure, and are entitled to receive appropriate Exchequer contributions on the full sum. In addition, £30 million has been held back for 1992-93 to assist the authorities experiencing heavy demand for expenditure on mandatory grants, and Bradford will have an opportunity to bid for these resources in due course.

Crawley Borough Council

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has decided to take in relation to Crawley borough council under part 1 of the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has given careful consideration to the responses that Crawley borough council has made to the notices under section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988 served on the authority on 29 July 1991 in relation to its failure to meet the specified financial objective in carrying out other catering work in 1989-90; on 9 October 1991 in relation to its failure to meet specified financial objective in carrying out vehicle maintenance work in 1990-91; and on 9 October 1991 in relation to its failure to meet the specified financial objective in carrying out refuse collection work 1990-91. He has decided to take no further action in relation to the authority's performance of other catering work. In relation to the its performance of the two other activities, he has today given the authority directions under section 14 of the 1988 Act, with the effect of requiring the authority to complete a retendering exercise for vehicle maintenance work by 1 October 1992, and to seek his consent by 1 July 1992 to any decision to reassign the work to the direct service organisation; and of requiring the authority to complete a retendering exercise for refuse collection work by 1 February 1993,and to seek his consent by 1 November 1992 to any decision to reassign the work to the direct service organisation.

Somerset Levels

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the agreement to safeguard the nature conservation interest of Glasson Moss, Wedholme Flow, Thorne and Hatfield Moors and Shapwick Heath and Westhay Moor in the Somerset levels by Fisons plc and English Nature.

Mr. Heseltine: Peat has been extracted from most of these sites under planning permissions given in the 1940s and 1950s, and could legitimately have continued well into the next century. The agreement provides for all of Fisons' freehold interests in these sites to be handed over at no cost to English Nature for management of the nature conservation interest. These include some of the most valuable peat sites in England.

Of the 8,000 acres involved, the 2,800 acres on which vegetation exists will be managed immediately by English Nature for nature conservation purposes and Fisons will assist them by blocking off drains and other measures to secure the hydrological integrity of the areas. Where lowland peatbog sites have already been affected by modern working, there is no conservation reason to prevent further extraction provided conditions for the eventual rehabilitation of the sites are met. It is for this reason that English Nature has agreed that peat extraction under licence from them may continue at most of the other sites—but on condition that this will only take place in ways that minimise the further effects on undisturbed peat and allow restoration when extraction ceases.

As peat extraction is completed, leaving behind an average depth of a half metre of peat to aid regeneration, these areas will gradually be transferred to English Nature management, and Fisons will assist with restoration for conservation after-use. In addition current research funded by Fisons into peatland regeneration will continue. This will complement research undertaken by my own Department into this subject.

This agreement is a considerable achievement. Taken together with the acquisition by the Nature Conservancy Council of the Fenns Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses, it demonstrates the positive steps being taken to conserve the major lowland peat bog sites in England.

Peat Extraction

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he was consulted over the arrangement to extract peat from Glassan Moss, Wedholmle Flow, Thame and Hatfield Moors, and Somerset Levels by Fisons plc and English Nature; and when he first knew of the arrangement.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* I have been aware for some considerable time of the confidential negotiations between English Nature and Fisons plc. The final agreement, by which Glasson Moss, Wedholme Flow, Thorne and Hatfield Moors, and Shapwick Heath and Westhay Moor in the Somerset Levels would be handed over by Fisons at no cost to English Nature, was reached over the Christmas period. The chairman and chief executive of English Nature briefed the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on 7 January.

TRANSPORT

Merchant Vessels

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will detail the procedure for Government procurement of civilian merchant vessels.

Mr. McLoughlin: Merchant shipping is normally procured for Government use by chartering on the commercial market through either the Government freight market representative on the Baltic Exchange, the Government freight agent, or other specialist ship brokers.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will name the broker responsible for chartering merchant vessels for the Government.

Mr. McLoughlin: Merchant vessels are chartered through the Government freight market representative on the Baltic Exchange, presently Mr. Richard Bilton. The Ministry of Defence also charters vessels through the Government freight agent—Hogg Robinson (GFA) Ltd. —and through other specialist ship brokers.

Government Assistance for Training Scheme

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the number of Merchant Navy officers who have upgraded their qualification under the Government assistance for training scheme for each of the years since it started.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of Merchant Navy officers who have upgraded their qualification under the GAFT scheme within each financial year since it started are given in the table.

Financial year	*Merchant Navy Officers*
1988-89	385
1989-90	448
1990-91	491
1991-92	[1]500

[1] Estimated

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the numbers of seafarers, recruited under the Government assistance for training scheme, trained on foreign flag vessels, including the flags of the Crown and dependent territories, specifying which flag, for each year since the scheme was started.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of seafarers recruited under the GAFT scheme within each financial year since it started are given in the table.

Financial year	*Officer Cadets*
1988-89	227
1989-90	413
1990-91	521
1991-92	[1]500

[1] Estimated

Funding is provided to individuals who are ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom and who are eligible on nationality grounds to serve as master or chief engineer on a United Kingdom ship. While the Department assesses each trainees record on approved courses no central register is maintained of the ships on which they are employed.

Coastguard Service

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many reviews of the coastguard service have been undertaken in the last 20 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Within the last 20 years there have been seven independent and three internal reviews of Her Majesty's coastguard covering all aspects of the organisation and including management, staffing—requirements, pay and grading—and resources.

London Transport

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will indicate the salaries of *(a)* the chairman and *(b)* board members of London Transport for 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Freeman: The annual salaries of the chairman and board members of London Transport for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are as follows:

	1990-91 £	*1991-92* £
Chairman		
Mr. C. Wilfrid Newton	100,000	106,000
Full-time Members		
Mr. John Telford Beasley	75,000	79,875
Mr. Anthony Sheppeck	74,000	76,150
Part-time Members		
Sir Neil Shields	22,000	28,000
Mr. Oscar Roith	11,000	29,290
Dr. Stephen Glaister	8,250	9,960
Mr. Roy Thomas	8,250	8,790
Mrs. Helen Robinson	8,250	8,790
Mr. Keith Brown	8,250	8,790
Mr. David Thompson	6,725	8,790
Sir Alan Bailey	6,725	8,790
Mr. J. Keith Davies	6,725	8,790

Increases in salaries for 1991-92 include provision for increased time commitment by a number of board members.

Roads, Leicester

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the tender secured by Travers Morgan to act as advisers on the proposed route of the Leicester eastern bypass was open to public competition.

Mr. Chope: Travers Morgan was appointed in the normal way, following a competition with other suitable consulting engineers drawn from the Department's approved list.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to bring into use the already completed dual carriageway section of the eastern district distributor road north of Goodwood road in Leicester.

Mr. Chope: The eastern district distributor road is a local road for which Leicestershire county council, as the highway authority, is responsible.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, before proceeding with the scheme to provide a Leicester eastern bypass, the views of the county council were sought.

Mr. Chope: No. If a viable scheme is identified the county council, and others, will have the opportunity to comment on the proposals at public consultation stage, before any final decision is taken to proceed with the project.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish details of the contract with Travers Morgan to act as advisers on the route of a Leicester eastern bypass.

Mr. Chope: Travers Morgan was commissioned under the Department's standard terms of engagement for highway consultancy commissions. As the contract document contains commercially sensitive information on fees and staff packages proposed by the firm and accepted by the Department, it is not the Department's policy to publish this information.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects the eastern district distributor road with the link to Oadby on the A6 to be completed;

(2) what is the daily traffic flow both ways on the eastern district distributor road in Leicester where it enters the borough at Oadby on the A6;

(3) if houses built by the city council on the Goodwood road part of the distributor road network in Leicester are to be demolished to enable dual carriageway construction to be completed;

(4) what is the present traffic flow on the distributor road network in Leicester; and by how much he estimates this will increase with the demolition of the houses in Goodwood road.

Mr. Chope: These are not matters for my Department. The eastern district distributor is a local road for which Leicestershire county council, as the highway authority, is responsible.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will terminate the arrangement made by his Department to appoint Travers Morgan as consultants for a Leicester eastern bypass.

Mr. Chope: No.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what account was taken of the work Travers Morgan had already performed for the Co-operative Wholesale Society, Manchester, in planning a business park and industrial estate and road network at the adjacent Stretton Magna when the tender for the Leicester eastern bypass was secured by them.

Mr. Chope: None. A condition of Travers Morgan's appointment for the Leicester eastern bypass commission was that it relinquished any further involvement in the Stretton Magna project. This it has done.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy not to proceed with any consideration of a Leicester eastern bypass until the eastern district distributor road network has been completed at Oadby and a traffic pattern has emerged.

Mr. Chope: No. The two roads would serve different functions. The Leicester eastern bypass would cater for long-distance trunk road traffic and provide continuity of the trunk road network around the city of Leicester; the county council's distributor road is to serve local traffic needs and improve the distribution of traffic within the city.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment was made of the views of the Harborough district council before proceeding with a Leicester eastern bypass.

Mr. Chope: None. If our preliminary investigations identify a viable scheme, Harborough district council will have the opportunity to comment on the scheme at public consultation stage and before any final decision is taken to proceed with the project.

British Rail (Wheelchairs)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last approved new British Rail rolling stock that was inaccessible to wheelchair users.

Mr. Freeman: There is currently no statutory requirement for the Secretary of State to approve new British Rail rolling stock. Powers are being sought in the Transport and Works Bill currently before the House. Modern rolling stock approved by HM railway inspectorate under voluntary arrangements with British Rail, since 1989, is accessible to wheelchair users.

New Roads

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy not to enter into schemes to design and build new roads without prior consultation with the hon. Members and borough and district councils involved.

Mr. Chope: Hon. Members and borough and district councils will have the opportunity to comment on schemes after viable options have been identified, at public consultation stage.

Departmental Achievements (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in north Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 February 1992]*: The expenditure by my Department on road construction and maintenance in North Yorkshire for the financial year 1991-92 to date is £22 million.

Progress on the national road programme in North Yorkshire in 1991 has included the opening of the A1 Gatenby lane junction and the A65 Draughton bypass.

The transport supplementary grant allocated to North Yorkshire in 1991-92 was £6·1 million. The annual capital guideline for roads and parking was £6·6 million. Supplementary credit approvals of £2·7 million included provision for the urban traffic control system in York.

Information on other transport expenditure and achievements, and comparable figures for the period between June 1979 and May 1980, are not available in the form requested.

Exeter Bypass

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects to receive the report from Acer Consultants on the proposal to bypass Exeter to the north and west.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Later this month.

DEFENCE

Service Pensions

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the amount of retired pay receivable by a lieutenant-colonel promoted from the ranks retiring respectively *(a)* before and *(b)* after 1 April 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For a late-entry lieutenant colonel with 34 years reckonable service the amounts of retired pay are as follows:

Date of retirement	*Original award £ per annum*	*Current retired pay £ per annum*
31 March 1988	11,105	14,033
1 April 1988	14,185	17,925

Since 1 April 1988 late-entrant lieutenant-colonels have been paid on the officers main scale as opposed to the lower rates previously in issue. They also qualify for increased pension entitlements. There are no plans to change pension entitlements retrospectively.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to increase the retired pay of majors and lieutenant-colonels promoted from the ranks who retired before 1 April 1988 so that they are more in line with the retired pay of those who retired after that date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The retired pay of majors promoted through the ranks is calculated on the same basis irrespective of the date of retirement. There are no plans for retrospective changes to the pension entitlement of late-entry lieutenant-colonels.

Tugs

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report,* column *526,* to the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) which tugs are to be replaced by the two new tugs ordered; whether any further tugs will be required on the full entry into service of Vanguard class submarines; what is their nominal bollard pull; and if a decision has been made on their names.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The names for the new tugs are Impetus and Impulse, and the nominal bollard pull is 36 tonnes. These tugs will not replace specific existing tugs. The size and composition of the marine services vessels changes with the overall size and deployment of the fleet and the need to replace older vessels as they come to the end of their economic lives.

AOR1RFA Fort Victoria

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the AOR1RFA Fort Victoria, being built at Harland and Wolff, to be delivered to the Royal Navy.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: On the basis of the shipbuilder's latest programme for completion, we expect to take delivery of the ship by the end of the year.

Defence Research Agency

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many quality assurance staff he expects to be relocated at Defence Research Agency sites at *(a)* Fort Halstead, *(b)* Chertsey, *(c)* Farnborough and *(d)* Pyestock; and how many are likely to face redundancy.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Many of the technical and scientific staff are expected to move with their tasks. Approximately 150 quality assurance technical posts are planned to be relocated at Fort Halstead and a further 200 technical posts in total to Farnborough, Pyestock and Chertsey. The distribution of posts between the latter sites is not yet finalised. In addition, a number of non-technical posts in support of quality assurance activities will be required at the above locations. We will do our best to minimise redundancies but, regrettably, it is not possible to guarantee that there will be none. The trade unions are being consulted in the normal way.

Purple Warrior Exercises

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the vessels, including details of country of registration, used in the Purple Warrior exercises.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The last tri-service exercise which required the charter of commercial shipping was Purple Warrior in November 1987. The ships that took part were as follows:

Name	*Flag*
Dana Regina	Danish
Tor Scandinavia	Danish
Hamburg	Bahamas
Norrona	Faroe Islands
Viking Viscount	British
Mercandian Atlantic	Danish
St. Magnus	FRG
Gabriela Wehr	FRG
Mercandian Diplomat	Danish
Condock 1	FRG
Condock 3	FRG

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future command of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The command of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary is to be simplified. The commander in chief, fleet, will in future exercise full command of the RFA in peace as well as war, making him responsible for ensuring that the RFA maintains the high levels of operational performance required to operate effectively in the front line in close support of warships. He will be supported by a senior RFA officer and a staff of RFA and other civilian personnel.

The RFA will remain a civilian organisation and these changes will not affect the conditions of service of RFA personnel. RFA vessels will continue to wear the blue ensign and will be manned by Merchant Navy officers and ratings. Responsibility for such issues as pay, conditions of service, recruitment and initial training will remain with the chief of fleet support and be discharged on his behalf by the director general of supplies and transport (naval).

It is planned to implement these changes by April 1993 and there will be full consultation with the trade unions involved. The new command arrangements will ensure that the RFA continues to make the vital contribution to our overall defence effort of which its personnel are rightly proud.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

United Nations Peace Keeping

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the United Kingdom will make the payment currently owed to the United Nations for special peace-keeping activities.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom makes its assessed payments for any United Nations peacekeeping operations within 30 days of receiving the request from the United Nations. The only exceptions are for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force where we offset part of our assessed payment against the logistic support we provide. The adjustment for this does not take place until the end of a mandate period.

President de Klerk

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent meeting with President de Klerk and the Minister of State at the Foreign Office.

Mrs. Chalker: I had a useful and constructive meeting with President de Klerk on 20 January. The President explained his proposals for a new constitution and transitional arrangements and he emphasised South Africa's urgent need for economic development. I emphasised our support for the CODESA process and for economic growth in South Africa.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Back Payments

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* claims have been received and *(b)* payments made in respect of claims for back payments under the additional requirement provisions for supplementary benefit at (i) the Lerwick and (ii) Kirkwall benefit agency offices in the last 12 months.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pensioners

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column *51*, if he will republish the figures of pensioner incomes, distinguishing for married couples between the incomes of husbands and wives.

Miss Widdecombe: The figures required on gross incomes net of retirement pensions and supplementary benefit/income support for husbands over state pension age, their wives and single people over state pension age are in the table.

Thousands

	Husbands	*Wives*	*Singles*
Up to £5	220	1,250	650
£5—£10	180	230	350
£10—£15	220	180	370
£15—£20	190	130	430
£20—£30	330	170	950
£30—£40	230	110	400
£40—£50	150	110	230
£50—£60	70	50	150
£60—£70	100	40	120
£70—£80	90	10	130
£80—£90	60	40	110
£90—£100	60	10	70
£100—£110	70	30	60
£110—£130	100	30	120
£130—£150	80	10	60
£150—£200	130	50	100
£200 and over	220	50	130

Note: All housing benefit paid to couples has been allocated to the husband.

Source: Family Expenditure Survey 1988.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing the value of the state basic pension for a single person—category A—and a married couple—category A plus category B—as percentages of *(a)* gross average earnings and *(b)* average earnings net of income tax and national insurance contribution in 1968, 1978 and each year thereafter.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the tables.

Table 1—Single Person

	Weekly Retirement Pension (RP)	*Gross Average Weekly Earnings (GAWE)*	*Net Average Weekly Earnings (NAWE)*	*RP as percentage of GAWE*	*RP as percentage of NAWE*
November 1968	4·50	23·25	17·10	19·4	26·3
November 1978	19·50	87·40	60·30	22·3	32·3
November 1979	23·30	103·60	73·20	22·5	31·8
November 1980	27·15	118·60	82·90	22·9	32·8
November 1981	29·60	129·50	88·50	22·9	33·4
November 1982	32·85	138·40	93·80	23·7	35·0

	Weekly Retirement Pension (RP)	*Gross Average Weekly Earnings (GAWE)*	*Net Average Weekly Earnings (NAWE)*	*RP as percentage of GAWE*	*RP as percentage of NAWE*
November 1983	34·05	147·70	100·40	23·1	33·9
November 1984	35·80	159·60	108·90	22·4	32·9
November 1985	38·30	168·70	115·60	22·7	33·1
July 1986	38·70	176·70	122·60	21·9	31·6
April 1987	39·50	185·50	131·30	21·3	30·1
April 1988	41·15	200·60	144·90	20·5	28·4
April 1989	43·60	217·80	157·20	20·0	27·7
April 1990	46·90	237·20	174·20	19·8	26·9
April 1991	52·00	253·10	186·50	20·5	27·9

Notes: Gross Average Weekly Earnings (GAWE) and Net Average Weekly Earnings (NAWE) are for male manual workers.
All dates are uprating dates except 1968 when there was no uprating.

Table 2—Married couple

	Weekly retirement pension (RP) £	*Gross average weekly earnings (GAWE)* £	*Net average weekly earnings (NAWE)* £	*RP as percentage GAWE*	*RP as percentage NAWE*
November 1968	7·30	23·25	18·05	31·4	40·4
November 1978	31·20	87·40	63·80	35·7	48·9
November 1979	37·30	103·60	77·00	36·0	48·4
November 1980	43·45	118·60	87·40	36·6	49·7
November 1981	47·35	129·50	93·00	36·6	50·9
November 1982	52·55	138·40	98·90	38·0	53·1
November 1983	54·50	147·70	106·20	36·9	51·3
November 1984	57·30	159·60	115·50	35·9	49·6
November 1985	61·30	168·70	122·80	36·3	49·9
July 1986	61·95	176·70	129·90	35·1	47·7
April 1987	63·25	185·50	138·40	34·1	45·7
April 1988	65·90	200·60	152·10	32·9	43·3
April 1989	69·80	217·80	164·80	32·0	42·4
April 1990	75·10	237·20	182·50	31·7	41·2
April 1991	83·25	253·10	194·80	32·9	42·7

Notes:
Gross average weekly earnings (GAWE) and net average weekly earnings (NAWE) are for male manual workers.
All dates are uprating dates except 1968 when there was no uprating.

Unemployed Pensioners

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of unemployed people aged over 55 years are disqualified from national insurance unemployment benefit, or have their national insurance benefit abated, because they are in receipt of occupational or personal pensions.

Mr. Jack: About 15,600, or 8·6 per cent. of unemployed claimants aged 55 or over are affected.

Source: "Half Yearly Analysis of Unemployed Claimants" (UBS3) May 1991—grossed up from 5 per cent. sample.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make provision available to unemployed people aged 55 years or over whose occupational pension is committed to the payment of mortgage interest or other debts, and whose capital is above the limits for income support.

Mr. Jack: The Government are committed to the policy of helping unemployed people meet their mortgage interest payments through income support where their circumstances qualify them for this benefit. However, we currently have no plans to extend this form of help by means of other social security benefits.

Pensions

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 3 February, *Official Report*, column 96, on raising state pensions, what would be the cost separated between employer and employee on average earnings for the changes proposed.

Miss Widdecombe: The combined weekly cost in extra national insurance contributions of the proposed changes to a man on average earnings and his employer would be *(a)* £6 and *(b)* £5·50. This estimate assumes an equal split between employer and employee.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Terrorism

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information requested is given in the table. The figures include those detained in both Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

	Number of persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism legislation detained in connection with Northern Irish terrorism	*Number of persons detained under the Prevention of Terrorism legislation detained in connection with international terrorism*[1]
1982	1,048	—
1983	1,366	—
1984	1,067	44
1985	1,137	73
1986	1,456	55
1987	1,643	41
1988	1,887	16
1989	17,46	18
1990	1,718	24
1991	[2]1,702	32
Total	14,770	303

[1] The power to detain persons in connection with international terrorism came into effect on 22 March 1984 with the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984.

[2] Provisional figure.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons who emanated *(a)* from the Republic of Ireland and *(b)* Northern Ireland have been detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts for each of the last 10 years;

(2) for each of the last five years, how many persons who emanated from the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland have been detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts on more than one occasion.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons who emanated from *(a)* the Republic of Ireland and *(b)* Northern Ireland were charged with offences following detention under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Statistics on those detained under the prevention of terrorism legislation are not kept in the form requested. The total numbers of people detained under the legislation and subsequently charged with offences are given in the table.

	Persons detained in connection with Northern Ireland terrorism and subsequently charged with offences [1]*Total*	*Persons detained in connection with international terrorism and subsequently charged with offences Total*
1982	22	—
1983	31	—
1984	23	[2]8
1985	38	15
1986	31	5
1987	17	8
1988	18	3
1989	18	3
1990	25	3
1991	7	—

[1] The figures given relate to those detained on the mainland of Great Britain only. Details of those detained under the legislation in Northern Ireland and subsequently charged with offences are not kept in the form requested. However, 3,983 such people were charged with offences during the period 29 November 1984 to 30 September 1991.

[2] The power to detain persons in connection with international terrorism came into effect on 22 March 1984 with the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons who emanated from *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland have been excluded from Great Britain following detention under the terms of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information available is given in the table.

	Total	*Number of people removed to Northern Ireland*	*Number of people removed to the Republic of Ireland*
1982	11	10	1
1983	13	12	1
1984	1	1	—
1985	2	2	—
1986	7	7	—
1987	15	14	1
1988	16	11	5
1989	9	9	—
1990	15	12	3
1991	10	7	3

The figures given show the number of people removed to Northern Ireland or to the Republic of Ireland in each year. In addition, 11 exclusion orders were made in Northern Ireland during this period. Nine of the orders excluded people from the whole of the United Kingdom and two excluded people from Northern Ireland only.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons who have emanated from Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland have been detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts in the Metropolitan police area for each of the last three years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the total number of people detained under the prevention of terrorism legislation in the Metropolitan police district in each of the last three years is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1989	30
1990	76
1991	57

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the dates on which the lower limit for eligibility for compensation under the criminal injuries compensation scheme has been raised since 1979, with the new limit in each case, expressed in cash terms and at 1991 prices.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is as follows:

Date new minimum award introduced	*Minimum award £*	*Equivalent value at 1991 prices (£) (using GDP deflator)*
April 1981	250	448
February 1983	400	669
November 1986	550	768
February 1990	750	871
January 1992	1,000	—

Prison Suicides

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young men under 25 years have committed suicide while on remand in prison in the last year.

Mrs. Rumbold: Eleven unsentenced male prisoners under the age of 25 years died as a result of an act of deliberate self-harm in 1991. Of these, two were convicted but awaiting sentence. Verdicts of suicide were recorded at all six of the inquests that have so far been held into these deaths.

Wolds Remand Centre

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to visit the site of the new Wolds remand centre.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I plan to visit Wolds remand prison later this month.

Leeds Prison

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next intends to visit Her Majesty's prison, Leeds.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I hope to include Leeds in my programme of future visits to prisons, but I have no firm arrangements for a visit at the moment.

Heroin

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what review he has undertaken of the standard of security arrangements maintained by the United Kingdom companies presently supplying pharmaceutical heroin—diamorphine—to the national health service.

Mr. John Patten: Companies that supply diamorphine are subject to stringent security requirements which are kept under regular review.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with air travel authorities about security problems arising from regular commercial shipment of heroin via United Kingdom airports.

Mr. John Patten: The transit of controlled drugs through United Kingdom airports has not hitherto given rise to any significant security problems. The arrangements for such movements are however kept under continuing review.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the International Narcotics Control Board on the proposals to allow commercial importation of heroin—diamorphine—to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My Department has consulted the International Narcotics Control Board and is taking its views into account.

Pit Bull Terriers

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many pit bull terriers have been registered in accordance with the provisions of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991; how many have been destroyed by their owners in preference to being registered; and how many he estimates remain unregistered.

Mrs. Rumbold: More than 8,000 notifications have been made in respect of all specially controlled dogs, including pit bull terriers. Some 400 claims for compensation have been made by owners who have had their dogs destroyed. Other owners have chosen to have their dogs destroyed but have not claimed compensation. By 11 February 3,200 certificates of exemption had been issued and some 1,100 applications are being processed.

The "Index of Exempted Dogs" is writing again to the remaining owners who have not yet obtained a certificate of exemption to remind them of their legal obligations.

Drinking and Driving

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was spent in each year from 1980 to 1991 on campaigns to stop drinking and driving.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

The expenditure by my Department on campaigns to stop drinking is recorded in financial years and between 1980-81 and 1990-91 the expenditure was as follows:

	£000
1980-81	1,589
1981-82	1,134
1982-83	1,183
1983-84	911
1984-85	818
1985-86	1,380
1986-87	2,296
1987-88	2,677
1988-89	2,130
1989-90	2,040
1990-91	2,011

PRIME MINISTER

Russia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what information he has on Russia's plans to continue its nuclear warhead testing programme to maintain the safety and reliability of its nuclear weapon deterrent.

The Prime Minister: President Yeltsin's statement of 29 January confirmed that Russia will adhere to the one-year moratorium on testing announced in October 1991. President Yeltsin also called for other nuclear powers to refrain from testing. The United Kingdom has to carry out nuclear tests from time to time to maintain the effectiveness and safety of our nuclear deterrent.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the British gross domestic product per head expressed as a proportion of the European Community average in 1980, 1985 and 1990, including only those countries which were members of the Community in 1980.

Mr. Mellor: Figures published by the OECD in "National Accounts 1969-1990" suggest that United Kingdom gross domestic product per head expressed as a percentage of the average for the EC excluding Greece, Portugal and Spain are as follows:

	Percentage
1980	90
1985	93
1990	94

These figures are based on data of GDP at current prices and current purchasing power parities. Figures are provisional and the final set to be issued later in the year will include new information for several countries including the United Kingdom.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: The central Treasury has two major applications which both accept and transmit electronic data. The financial information system takes in and then confirms with Departments their planned and current expenditure. The Treasury economic service accepts financial and economic data from both governmental—for example, Central Statistical Office—and commercial sources—for example, the *Financial Times*, Reuters, and so on.

Computer centre Chessington interchanges information with other Government Departments and associated bodies in connection with pay, personnel and financial accounting computer systems. No Treasury data information systems are linked to the PNC; nor is there any intention that they should be.

The administration of all Treasury data information systems complies with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984.

Universities Tax

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations the Inland Revenue has received from universities about tax treatment of consultancy earnings, holiday lettings and conference facilities; and what response has been given.

Mr. Maude: The Inland Revenue has recently had discussions about the tax treatment of these activities with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom, at the committee's request.

The Inland Revenue has explained that universities are entitled to the same tax exemptions as other charities. Trading profits are exempt only where the trade is exercised in the course of the actual carrying out of a primary purpose of the charity, or where the work in connection with the trade is mainly carried out by beneficiaries of the charity. Profits from other trading activities are likely to be taxable, in the same way as for other traders. The outcome in each case will depend on its own particular facts.

The Inland Revenue is seeking further information to assist in determining whether any particular activities give rise to taxable profits.

Taxation (HGV Telephones)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received concerning the taxation of telephones in heavy goods vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend has received a few representations on the taxation of the benefit of private use of employer provided telephones in heavy goods vehicles.

"Official Report"

Mr. Straw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the price charged for the daily *Official Report* of parliamentary debates in 1970, 1974, 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992, and with a constant price index where 1970 = 100.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Actual Price in February*	*Price Expressed in 1970 terms*
1970	2s 3d	2s 3d
1974	20p	14p
1979	40p	14p
1983	£1·00	22p
1987	£2·95	53p
1992	£7·50	£1·04

For many years the prices of parliamentary debates were heavily subsidised. In 1983, when the annual subsidy stood at £6 million, the Government decided progressively to reduce the level of subsidy required, by a combination of price increases and improved methods of production. I was able to announce last November that the latest price increases, together with plans to enable the reports of proceedings to be "machine-read" by the HMSO presses, should permit the final elimination of the revenue subsidy —1 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *3*.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mortgage repossession schemes he has considered with mortgage lenders since his statement of 19 December; how many families for each scheme are expected to be housed; how many families have already been housed; what has been the total cost; and if he will give the proportion met from public funds.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Lenders have pledged funding for mortgage rescue schemes which is expected by the Council of Mortgage Lenders to amount to £1 billion if the need is there. Detailed schemes have already been announced by some lenders and announcements from others are expected shortly. It is too early to provide estimates of the number of borrowers in difficulties who are being helped in these schemes or the consequential effect on housing benefit expenditure.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Bullying

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice and guidance he issues to local education authorities for the use of teachers and school governors to counteract bullying; and if he will assist with the provision of educational materials to help children when confronted with the problem.

Mr. Fallon: The report of the committee of inquiry into discipline in schools, chaired by Lord Elton and published in 1989, contained advice on bullying. Copies of the report were sent to all schools and local education authorities in England and Wales. The Department is funding a major research project on bullying which is aimed at making available guidance on good practice for all schools when the project is completed in August 1993.

Pupil Numbers

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children attended *(a)* primary—infant and junior—and *(b)* secondary schools in England each year since 1979.

Mr. Fallon: The number of pupils, in England, for the categories shown are given in the table.

Full-time equivalent pupils in primary and secondary schools in England 1979 to 1991

	Maintained primary schools	*Maintained secondary schools*
1979	4,444,500	3,872,000
1980	4,285,600	3,866,100
1981	4,098,700	3,839,900
1982	3,922,800	3,798,000
1983	3,752,400	3,740,900
1984	3,668,600	3,645,600
1985	3,645,000	3,525,800
1986	3,654,600	3,388,500
1987	3,684,600	3,239,500
1988	3,731,600	3,070,200
1989	3,786,300	2,944,700
1990	3,859,400	2,862,600
1991	3,914,800	2,853,300

Education Expenditure

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the total capital spending on *(a)* primary—infant and junior—and *(b)* secondary schools in England each year since 1979 in cash terms and at 1979 prices; and what was the percentage change in the level of spending in real terms between each of those years.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested is set out in the table.

Capital expenditure: Local authority maintained schools in England

Year	*Nursery and primary*			*Secondary*		
	Cash terms £ million	*1978-80 prices £ million*	*Percentage change on previous year*	*Cash terms £ million*	*1979-80 prices £ million*	*Percentage change on previous year*
1979-80	124	124	—	201	201	—
1980-81	162	137	+10·5	229	194	−3·5
1981-82	131	101	−26·3	183	141	−27·3
1982-83	131	94	−6·9	197	142	+0·7
1983-84	146	100	+6·4	197	135	−4·9
1984-85	171	112	+12·0	197	129	−4·4
1985-86	195	121	+8·0	202	125	−3·1
1986-87	215	129	+6·6	205	123	−1·6
1987-88	254	145	+12·4	215	123	0·0
1988-89	336	179	+23·4	279	148	+20·3
1989-90	379	189	+5·6	376	188	+27·0

Notes:

(1) 1989-90 is the latest year for which final outturn data are available.

(2) Spending covers LEA maintained, voluntary aided and special agreement schools; DES grant and Governors' contribution to voluntary aided schools split 63 per cent. primary and 37 per cent. secondary as in 1990-91 VA major named projects.

(3) Spending on special education is excluded.

(4) Spending figures are rounded to the nearest £1 million.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the total spending on *(a)* primary—infant and junior—and *(b)* secondary schools in England each year since 1979 in cash terms and at 1979 prices; and what was the percentage change in the level of spending in real terms between each of those years.

Mr. Fallon: Net recurrent spending on primary and secondary schools in England is shown in the tables. The tables show for each year from 1979-80 to 1989-90, the latest year for which actual spending figures are available, expenditure in cash, expenditure at 1979-80 prices, and the percentage change in real terms spending from the previous year.

Nursery and primary schools[2]

Year	*Net recurrent expenditure*[1] *£ million*	*Net recurrent expenditure at 1979-80 prices*[3] *£ million*	*Real terms change on previous year percentage*
1979-80	19,081	19,081	
1980-81	23,282	19,675	3·1
1981-82	25,222	19,438	−1·2
1982-83	26,561	19,108	−1·7
1983-84	27,654	19,013	−0·5
1984-85	28,630	18,747	−1·4
1985-86	30,509	18,933	1·0
1986-87	34,011	20,434	7·9
1987-88	38,291	21,819	6·8
1988-89	42,254	22,464	3·0
1989-90	47,617	23,773	5·8

Secondary schools

Year	*Net recurrent expenditure*[1] *£ million*	*Net recurrent expenditure at 1979-80 prices*[3] *£ million*	*Real terms change on previous year percentage*
1979-80	24,846	24,846	
1980-81	30,934	26,141	5·2
1981-82	34,384	26,498	1·4
1982-83	36,915	26,557	0·2
1983-84	38,800	26,677	0·5
1984-85	40,173	26,305	−1·4
1985-86	43,523	27,009	2·7
1986-87	45,617	27,406	1·5
1987-88	49,067	27,959	2·0
1988-89	52,217	27,761	−0·7
1989-90	55,391	27,654	−0·4

[1] Net recurrent expenditure includes total expenditure other than costs of financing capital expenditure, less income other than from specific grants.

[2] Spending on nursery and primary schools was not collected separately for years after 1986-87, so expenditure figures cover both nursery and primary schools.

[3] Expenditure figures have been repriced to 1979-80 prices using the current GDP (market prices) deflator index.

Note: The figures in the tables are derived from local education authorities' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment.

Schools (Capital Schemes)

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a list of secondary schools that have applied for borrowing approval for capital schemes; and, in each case, whether approval was given.

Mr. Fallon: Under the terms of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, only local authorities are allowed to bid for borrowing approval for capital schemes.

Details of all secondary schools included within LEAs' capital bids and our decisions in each case could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

International Fund for Agricultural Development

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of the international fund for agricultural development in achieving its aim of providing long-term aid.

Mrs. Chalker: The IFAD has an effective monitoring and evaluation system, which includes the provision of an annual report on evaluation findings to the executive board. An evaluation committee of the board meets regularly to examine issues in more detail.

Africa (Food Crisis)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further contribution Her Majesty's Government are making to the second phase of the United Nation's international fund for agricultural development to overcome Africa's food crisis; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We consider that IFAD's future activities in Africa should be financed in the same way as its work elsewhere. The most important priority is to work for a successful outcome to the fourth replenishment of IFAD's resources, discussions on which will start in Qatar in April.

WALES

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what is the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department has no existing or planned links between its computer systems and external data information systems or the police national computer.

Government Grants

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what Government grants were awarded for *(a)* ferry services and *(b)* bridge projects in Wales listed by county, for each of the last five years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has not grant-aided any ferry services. Local authority road schemes supported under transport grant can involve bridges, and assistance can be provided, for example, through the urban programme, European regional development fund and historic buildings and ancient monuments grants. A central record is not kept.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to identify and quantify the use made of day centres in South Glamorgan for Alzheimer's disease sufferers and their carers and the extent to which they have succeeded in improving the quality of life for those involved.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* The three-day centres run by the Alzheimer's Disease Society in Cardiff provide a valuable service for sufferers and their carers.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy to extend the finances available through urban aid grant for running day centres for those suffering from Alzheimer's disease and their carers in South Glamorgan.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* In Wales, funding previously available for mental illness services through the urban programme is now directed through the mental illness strategy. In 1992-93, the Welsh Office will make £58,035 directly available to the Alzheimer's Disease Society for the running of its three day centres in Cardiff.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for each county in Wales his estimate of the number of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease at the present time and in each of the past five years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The information is not available centrally, but, based on an estimate derived from the NHS Health Advisory Service's publication "The Rising Tide—Developing Services for Mental Illness in Old Age" published in November 1982, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, there are approximately 28,000—9,500 males and 18,500 females—suffering from Alzheimer's disease in Wales.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the centres available in each county in Wales which cater for Alzheimer's disease sufferers and their carers together with the financial contribution made to each by his Department.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The information is not available centrally, but the Department made available in 1991-92 a total of £2·26 million through the mental illness strategy and elderly initiative grant schemes towards services in Wales for elderly people with a mental illness, including sufferers from Alzheimer's disease.

Waste Water

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total percentage of waste water *(a)* treated at inland works and receiving secondary or tertiary treatment, *(b)* treated at inland works and receiving primary treatment or less, *(c)* discharged at sea through properly designed long outfalls and *(d)* discharged into the sea without treatment by the water authorities operational in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the following three reports: House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities 10th report "Municipal Waste Water Treatment"; The study of coastal sewage discharges carried out by consultants in environmental services for the Department of the Environment, a copy of which is in the Library of the House; and "Waterfacts 1990" published by the Water Services Association, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Projected Traffic Levels

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish his latest estimate of projected traffic levels for Welsh roads for 2000.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Overall traffic growth in Wales is expected to be in line with the current National Road Traffic Forecasts which give an increase in traffic between 1991 and 2000 of 18 per cent. on low growth and 30 per cent. at high growth.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what data information systems his office has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The Privy Council Office has data information systems for routine administrative purposes, and a link is maintained with the Chessington computer centre, which operates the payment of salaries. The department is subject to the Data Protection Act 1984 to the extent specified in section 38 of the Act, and personal data held are covered, except where they are expressly exempt.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refreshment Facilities

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many high chairs are available in refreshment establishments within the House of Commons for the use of children.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall ask the Director of Catering Services to write to my hon. Friend.

Members' Salaries

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will outline the implications for future changes in hon. Members' salaries of the negotiations taking place on performance pay for grades 5 to 7 civil servants.

Mr. MacGregor: The nature of the new pay arrangements for grades 5 to 7 civil servants are currently being developed. It is too early to assess the implications, if any, for future changes in hon. Members' salaries.

Divisions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list in order from largest to smallest the numbers of Divisions hon. Members took part in during the 1990-91 Session.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 31 January 1992]:* This information is available in a document entitled "Survey of Voting Participation Rates Regarding House of Commons Divisions", published by Campaign Information, a copy of which is available in the Library.

HEALTH

North-West Region (Hospitals)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there were in the North-West regional hospitals in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1987 and *(c)* 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table.

National Health Service Hospitals, North Western Regional Health Authority

Year	*Average daily number beds*	*In-patients*	*Day cases*
[1]1979	30,812	509,049	70,608
[1]1987-88	27,320	644,540	120,368
[2]1990-91	24,057	733,809	153,220

[1] In-patients; discharges and deaths.

[2] In-patients: finished consultant episodes.

Radiotherapy (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are awaiting radiotherapy in the Greater Manchester health authorities; how many were on the lists for treatment in each year since 1989; and what is the average waiting time for treatment in each authority in each of those years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on the number of patients waiting for radiotherapy is given in the table. The median waiting time for those treated from radiotherapy waiting lists in the Greater Manchester area was 23 days in 1988-89 and 22 days in 1989-90. Information is not yet available centrally for 1990-91.

The figures relate to South Manchester, the only health district in Greater Manchester where radiotherapy is carried out.

Greater Manchester—Waiting lists for radiotherapy In-patients and day cases

Year	*Number waiting*[1]
March 1989	190
March 1990	244
March 1991	183

[1] Total number waiting less self-deferred cases.

Long-stay Beds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* each district health authority the current number of national health serrvice long-stay continuing care beds.

Mr. Dorrell: The only figures available centrally on long-stay beds relate to mental illness and learning disability. For information on numbers of geriatric beds, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) on 11 February. Long-stay geriatic beds are not separately identified.

Patients (Personal Information)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to allow a patient to consent to, or to be aware of, those uses and disclosures of personal information that are not obvious at the time the patient provides the information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Patients give consent (either expressly or implicitly) to the use of personal information for the purpose of their care and treatment and for NHS management purposes. The Department is currently consulting about a draft EC directive on data protection which includes a proposal that individuals should be given specific advice about the purposes for which it is proposed to record information about them.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS trusts are required to have qualified and nominated officers with financial responsibility corresponding to those in the Local Government Acts 1975 and 1988.

Mr. Dorrell: Paragraph 6.2b of schedule 2 of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 clearly states that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has the power to control the qualifications of persons who may be employed as officers of the trust if he thinks it necessary.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responsibilities non-executive directors of NHS trusts are required to exercise for audit and financial scrutiny.

Mr. Dorrell: An NHS trust's accounts are the corporate responsibility of the trust's board. All board members, including the non-executives, are expected to take general responsibility for every aspect of the trust's business and operation. While it is not a statutory responsibility many of the non-executive directors have financial and commercial backgrounds of particular relevance and are able to make an effective contribution to financial management.

Cost-weighted Activity Index

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department calculates the cost-weighted activity index; and if he will place the relevant technical papers in the Library.

Mr. Dorrell: The cost-weighted activity index is a broad aggregate measure of the increase in activity in the hospital and community health services. Since activity increases at different rates in different areas of the HCHS, and it would not be appropriate to add different types of activity together—for example hospital in-patient activity and treatments by chiropodists—the increases in activity in each of these areas are weighted together according to the proportion of total expenditure on them. Thus, because hospital in-patient activity consumes the largest share of expenditure—over 60 per cent.—growth in this area of activity has the highest weight in the index.

A more detailed description of the construction of the index, with information about the specific areas of activity included, and the expenditure weights used, was published in the Department of Health evidence to the Social Services Committee in 1986 and details of certain revisions to the index were given in the Department of Health memorandum to the Health Committee in 1991. Both of these publications are available in the Library.

Citizens Charter

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what effects the citizens charter will have on the provision of information for patients about medical treatment.

Mr. Dorrell: The patients charter confirms the existing right of patients to receive sufficient information about the proposed treatments, the possible alternatives and any substantial risks, so that they can make a balanced judgment in deciding whether to consent to treatment.

Cardiologists

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of cardiologists per one million population in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland at the last convenient date for which data is available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest data available show that there are 3·3 consultant cardiologists per million population in England. Information relating to Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Medical Treatment

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Helth what measures his Department is taking to ensure that questions regarding medical treatment, whenever the patient requests such information, are answered in a prompt, accurate and comprehensive form.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department issued guidelines in August 1991 which required that before a patient receives treatment he is entitled to as much information as is necessary in order to decide whether to consent to that treatment. After treatment has commenced, a patient has the right under the Access to Health Records Act 1990 to see his record and to receive an explanation of the information recorded. The Department's advice on the Act encourages the informal voluntary disclosure of information.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government will bring forward legislation to provide better information for patients about medical treatment.

Mr. Dorrell: Such legislation is unnecessary since patients have the right under common law to give or withhold consent prior to examination or treatment. To exercise this right patients are entitled to be given a clear explanation of any treatment proposed, including any risks and any alternatives.

Qa Business Services

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish a public inquiry into the sale of Qa Business Services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Qa Business Services was formed in December 1989 as a result of a management buyout of the management services division of West Midlands regional health authority. The company was put into administrative receivership in September 1991. Some of the assets of the company were acquired by AT & T ISTEL in October 1991. Any investigation of this company's affairs would be a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry.

NHS Administration

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of staff employed by the NHS are engaged in administrative work; and what was the figure in 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At September 1990, staff employed on the terms and conditions of the administrative and clerical staffs Whitley council made up 15·1 per cent. of the total NHS work force in England compared with 13·3 per cent. at September 1979. More than one quarter of them work in direct support to clinicians. Numbers of such clinically-related staff have nearly trebled since 1979 and this is helping to free clinical staff to concentrate their skills and experience on direct patient care.

Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in preparing a statement about the rules governing the confidentiality and security of personal data held within the OPCS; and if he will now make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: A draft statement of policies has now been produced, a copy of which I have placed in the Library. The Registrar General will be seeking the views of a range of outside bodies before this statement is formally adopted. The policies it proposes are, however, being followed in OPCS, pending consideration of the views obtained through the consultation process.

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of allowances and expenses to members of family practitioner committees in the last year for which figures are available; and what is the projected cost of such allowances and expenses in the first full year of family health service units.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* Family health services authorities (FHSAs) were established on 17 September 1990 and consequently 1989-90 was the last full financial year of operation for their predecessor family practitioner committees (FPCs). Arrangements to remunerate (essentially to compensate) members for their time spent on FHSA business were introduced only during 1989-91.

The information derivable from the 1989-90 and 1990-91 annual accounts of FPCs/FHSAs in England is shown as follows.

This detailed information is not collected in-year and any projected cost for the current financial year would be speculative. However, broadly equivalent information derived from the 1991-92 annual accounts of FHSAs will be available in the autumn.

	1989-90 £000 (cash)	*1990-91 £000 (cash)*
Chairmen's remuneration	450	1,003
Members' remuneration	—	2,234
Members' travelling and subsistence expenses	498	527

NORTHERN IRELAND

Health Service Staff

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list, by staff grade and specialty, the number of full-time equivalent medical and nursing posts available to health service hospitals for 1976, 1981, 1986 and 1991.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is set out in the tables.

Hospital medical staff—Northern Ireland
Analysis by specialty and grade, showing number of staff in post and whole-time equivalent at 30 September 1986

	Consultants		*SHMOS and associate specialists*		*Senior registrars*		*Registrars*		*Senior house officers*		*Pre-Reg house officers*		*All grades*	
Specialty	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*
Accident and Emergency	7	7·0	9	8·6	2	2·0	1	1·0	38	37·0	2	2·0	59	57·6
Anaesthetics	87	84·0	8	7·2	17	16·0	22	21·5	27	27·0	0	0·0	161	155·7
Anatomy	1	0·5	1	0·9	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·4
Cardiology	15	14·7	0	0·0	1	1·0	4	4·0	8	8·0	4	4·0	32	31·7
Cardiothoracic Surgery	3	3·0	0	0·0	2	2·0	3	3·0	3	3·0	0	0·0	11	11·0
Chemical Pathology	1	1·0	0	0·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	5	5·0
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	3	2·6	1	1·0	3	3·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	8	7·6
Clinical Genetics	1	0·6	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·6
Clinical Neuro-Physiology	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0
Clinical Pharmacology	4	2·2	0	0·0	2	1·5	1	1·0	4	4·0	2	2·0	13	10·7
Dermatology	11	10·4	1	0·6	1	1·0	1	1·0	4	4·0	1	1·0	19	18·0
Ent (Otdrhindlaryngology)	22	20·5	1	0·6	3	2·5	7	7·0	12	12·0	0	0·0	45	42·6
Gen Med Spec Int Geriatrics	2	2·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	2·0
General Medicine	58	54·1	3	3·0	14	12·5	9	8·0	98	98·0	56	55·1	238	230·7
General Pathology	4	4·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	4	4·0	0	0·0	8	8·0
General Surgery	53	50·5	0	0·0	7	6·5	16	14·0	72	71·5	61	61·0	209	203·5
Genito-Urinary Medicine	2	2·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	4	4·0
Geriatric Medicine	16	14·4	7	7·0	5	4·5	2	2·0	16	16·0	4	4·0	50	47·9
Haematology/Blood Transfusion	10	9·0	4	3·1	7	7·0	1	1·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	24	22·1
Histology	1	0·2	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	0·2
Histopathology	16	12·9	0	0·0	9	6·5	5	5·0	5	5·0	0	0·0	35	29·4
Immuno-Pathology	1	0·6	0	0·0	1	1·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	3	2·6
Infectious Diseases	2	2·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	4	4·0	0	0·0	7	7·0
Medical Microbiology	8	7·1	0	0·0	1	1·0	5	5·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	16	15·1
Medical Oncology	2	1·1	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·1
Mental Handicap	6	6·0	8	8·0	2	1·5	4	3·5	0	0·0	0	0·0	20	19·0
Mental Illness	45	42·2	15	14·0	20	16·6	20	19·0	41	41·0	0	0·0	141	132·8
Nephrology	3	3·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	1	1·0	2	2·0	1	1·0	8	8·0
Neurology	4	3·5	0	0·0	1	1·0	1	1·0	6	5·5	0	0·0	12	11·0
Neurosurgery	4	3·5	0	0·0	1	1·0	2	2·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	8	7·5
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	41	36·7	2	2·0	8	7·5	15	14·0	74	72·5	1	1·0	141	133·7
Ophthalmology	14	12·4	13	9·2	1	1·0	10	10·0	6	6·0	0	0·0	44	38·6
Orthopaedics	21	18·7	0	0·0	6	6·0	4	3·5	6	5·0	10	10·0	47	43·2
Other Departments	1	1·0	1	0·6	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·6
Paediatric Surgery	3	3·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	2·0	6	6·0	2	2·0	13	13·0
Paediatrics	20	17·2	1	0·5	4	3·5	7	6·5	39	37·5	4	4·0	75	69·2
Physiology	4	0·6	1	0·2	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	5	0·8
Plastic Surgery	5	4·5	0	0·0	2	2·0	1	0·5	1	1·0	2	2·0	11	10·0
Radiology	36	35·2	1	0·5	5	5·0	11	11·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	55	53·6
Radiotherapy	5	5·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	4	4·0	5	5·0	0	0·0	14	14·0
Rheumatology and Rehabilitation	2	2·0	0	0·0	2	2·0	1	1·0	5	5·0	3	3·0	13	13·0
Thoracic Medicine	0	0·0	3	3·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	3	3·0	0	0·0	8	8·0
Urology	4	4·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	4	4·0
All Specialties	549	505·4	80	69·8	134	122·1	163	155·5	499	493·0	153	152·1	1,578	1,498·0

Note: This report excludes 'community medicine' staff and 65 staff on 'study leave'.

Hospital medical staff—Northern Ireland
Analysis by specialty and grade, showing number of staff in post and whole-time equivalent at 30 September 1990

	Consultants		*SHMOS and associate specialists*		*Senior registrars*		*Registrars*		*Senior house officers*		*Pre-Reg house officers*		*All grades*	
Specialty	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*	*No.*	*WTE*
Accident and Emergency	8	8·0	8	7·5	2	2·0	2	2·0	49	45·4	0	0·0	69	64·9
Anaesthetics	99	95·3	8	7·2	18	17·5	19	19·0	29	29·0	0	0·0	173	168·0
Anatomy	1	0·5	1	0·9	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·4
Cardiology	14	13·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	3	3·0	9	9·0	4	4·0	31	30·8
Cardiothoracic Surgery	5	5·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	3	3·0	3	3·0	0	0·0	12	12·0
Chemical Pathology	3	2·6	0	0·0	2	2·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	7	6·0
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	5	4·6	1	1·0	4	4·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	12	11·6
Clinical Genetics	1	0·6	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	3	2·6
Clinical Neuro-Physiology	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0
Clinical Pharmacology	4	2·2	0	0·0	1	0·6	1	0·5	1	1·0	0	0·0	7	4·3
Dermatology	12	11·4	1	0·6	1	1·0	3	3·0	3	3·0	0	0·0	20	19·0
Endocrinology and Diabetes	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	2·0
Ent (Otdrhindlaryngology)	22	20·5	1	0·6	4	4·0	5	5·0	16	16·0	0	0·0	48	46·1
Forensic Psychiatry	1	1·0	0	0·0	1	0·5	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·5
Gen Med Spec Int Geriatrics	7	7·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	7	7·0
General Medicine	60	56·1	2	2·0	10	9·5	8	7·5	104	104·0	67	67·0	251	246·1
General Pathology	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0
General Surgery	52	49·0	1	1·0	8	7·5	20	18·6	66	65·0	66	66·0	213	207·1
Genito-Urinary Medicine	3	2·9	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	6	5·9
Geriatric Medicine	17	15·2	7	7·0	1	1·0	1	1·0	23	23·0	6	6·0	55	53·2
Haematology/Blood Transfusion	12	11·0	3	2·6	3	3·0	2	2·0	4	4·0	0	0·0	24	22·7
Histology	1	0·2	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	0·2
Histopathology	22	19·2	0	0·0	5	4·0	6	5·5	6	6·0	0	0·0	39	34·7
Immuno-Pathology	1	0·6	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·6
Infectious Diseases	2	2·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	5	5·0	0	0·0	7	7·0
Medical Microbiology	12	11·1	0	0·0	5	5·0	2	2·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	21	20·1
Medical Oncology	2	1·1	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·1
Mental Handicap	7	7·0	7	7·0	2	1·5	0	0·0	2	2·0	0	0·0	18	17·5

Specialty	Consultants No.	Consultants WTE	SHMOS and associate specialists No.	SHMOS and associate specialists WTE	Senior registrars No.	Senior registrars WTE	Registrars No.	Registrars WTE	Senior house officers No.	Senior house officers WTE	Pre-Reg house officers No.	Pre-Reg house officers WTE	All grades No.	All grades WTE
Mental Illness	45	42·6	13	11·9	14	12·0	8	7·0	64	63·0	0	0·0	144	136·5
Nephrology	5	4·1	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	3	3·0	2	2·0	11	10·1
Neurology	5	4·5	0	0·0	2	2·0	1	1·0	5	5·0	0	0·0	13	12·5
Neuropathology	1	0·6	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·6
Neurosurgery	4	3·5	0	0·0	1	1·0	2	2·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	8	7·5
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	41	38·0	1	1·0	7	6·5	17	15·5	68	68·0	1	1·0	135	130·0
Occupational Medicine	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0
Ophthalmology	13	12·0	12	8·5	4	4·0	5	4·5	7	7·0	0	0·0	41	36·0
Orthopaedics	22	19·4	0	0·0	4	4·0	4	4·0	10	10·0	9	9·0	49	46·4
Other Departments	1	1·0	1	0·6	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·6
Paediatric Surgery	3	3·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	4	4·0	1	1·0	9	9·0
Paediatrics	21	18·8	1	0·5	4	3·0	8	8·0	48	47·5	0	0·0	82	77·7
Physiology	3	0·5	1	0·2	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	4	0·6
Plastic Surgery	5	4·4	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	2·0	1	1·0	2	2·0	10	9·4
Psychiatry of Old Age	2	1·6	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	2	1·6
Psychotherapy	1	1·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	1	1·0
Radiology	46	45·3	1	0·5	5	5·0	4	4·0	4	4·0	0	0·0	60	53·6
Radiotherapy	5	5·0	0	0·0	1	1·0	3	3·0	6	6·0	0	0·0	15	15·0
Rheumatology and Rehabilitation	5	4·6	0	0·0	1	1·0	1	1·0	8	8·0	1	1·0	16	15·6
Thoracic Medicine	0	0·0	3	2·9	1	0·5	0	0·0	0	0·0	0	0·0	4	3·4
Urology	4	4·0	0	0·0	2	2·0	1	0·6	0	0·0	0	0·0	7	6·6
All Specialties	607	563·2	73	63·4	120	112·1	139	132·7	554	547·9	159	159·0	1,652	1,578·3

Note: This report excludes 'community medicine' staff and 60 staff on 'study leave'.

Government Grants

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what Government grants were awarded for *(a)* ferry services and *(b)* bridge projects in Northern Ireland listed by region, for each of the last five years.

Mr. Needham: Grants amounting to approximately £60,000 have been awarded in the current financial year to the operators of the ferry service between Ballycastle and Rathlin island. No grants were awarded in previous years.

The funding of public road bridges is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Road Schemes

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the major capital road schemes programmed in 1989 for the years 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93; and what was the estimated cost of each scheme.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Financial Year and Proposed Schemes	*Total estimated cost £ million (at 1989 prices)*
1989-90	
Frederick Street, Belfast	2·7
East Link, Dundonald	0·6
Greenmount Link Roundabout, Coleraine	0·2
Crossnadonnell, Limavady	0·4
Strand Road/Culmore Road, Londonderry	0·8
Bridge Street/Tavanagh Avenue, Portadown	0·9
Newry 8A (Canal Street/Downshire Road Link)	1·4
Dunmurry By-Pass: Stage 2.C	3·1
A48 Donaghadee Road, Newtownards	1·1
T4 Hillsborough Bypass Junction	0·4
Strabane Bypass: Stage 1	3·8
Enniskillen Throughpass: Stage 3B (Link road)	0·1
Enniskillen Throughpass: Stage 3B	1·0
1990-91	
T8 Castledawson Bypass	3·1
B101 Oldstone Road: Stage 2	1·1
Forster Green Junction, Belfast	0·5
Ballymaconaghy Road, Castlereagh: Phase 1	0·1
Ballymaconaghy Road, Castlereagh: Phase 2	0·5
Castlereagh Roundabout, Belfast	1·1
Greenmount Link, Coleraine: Stage 5	0·4
Bushmills Road, Coleraine	0·7
Church Street/Scotch Street, Downpatrick	1·0
Dunmurry Bypass: Stage 2D	2·5
High Street/Hamilton Road, Bangor	1·3
1991-92	
Killead Bypass	1·5
M2 Crosskennan Slip Roads	0·5
Belfast Schemes arising from Belfast Urban Area Plan	3·3
Queen's Quay, Londonderry	1·2
T4 Mullan's Corner Dualling	1·8
Newry Bypass: Stage 2	3·4
1992-93	
A26 Antrim/Ballymena Dualling: Stage 2	3·1
Belfast Schemes arising from Belfast Urban Area Plan	3·3
Strand Road, Londonderry: Stage 2	0·9
Greenmount Link, Coleraine: Stages 3 and 4	0·5
Newry Bypass: Stage 3	5·8
Comber Bypass: Stage 2	2·6
Omagh Throughpass: Stage 2	2·7

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the major capital road schemes programmed in 1987 for the years 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92; and what was the estimated cost of each scheme.

Mr. Needham: Prior to 1989 the programme for major capital road schemes only covered a three-year period. In 1987 the programme was as follows:

Financial year and proposed schemes	*Total estimated cost £m (at 1987 prices)*
1987-88	
Spine Road, Carrickfergus	0·6
A26 Antrim-Ballymena Dualling Stage 1	3·1
A57/B101 Airport Road, Antrim	0·9
T1 Tillysburn Roundabout, Belfast	1·0
Short Strand, Belfast	1·3
East Link, Dundonald	0·5
Longwood Road, Newtownabbey	0·5
Waterside/Caw, Londonderry	2·2
T4 Banbridge Bypass Dualling: Bridge	0·2
Lisburn Throughpass (Bridge Street-Hillsborough Road)	1·2
T4 Hillsborough Bypass Junction	0·5
A29 Carland Bridge	0·8
Omagh Throughpass: Stage 2	2·6
1988-89	
T8 Castledawson Bypass	2·1
Frederick Street, Belfast	1·4
Greenmount Link Roundabout, Coleraine	0·1
Buncrana Road, Londonderry	0·3
Banbridge Bypass Dualling	1·4
Bridge Street/Tavanagh Avenue, Portadown	0·3
Newry 8A (Canal Street/Downshire Road Link)	0·8
Dunmurry Bypass: Stage 2A	2·1
Balloo Road, Bangor: Stage 2	0·5
1989-90	
Killead Bypass	0·8
Northern Distributor, Ballymena	2·2
A26 Antrim-Ballymena Dualling: Stage 2	2·5
Forster Green Junction, Belfast	1·4
Greenmount Link, Coleraine: Stages 3 and 4	0·4
Strand Road, Londonderry: Stage 3, Phase 2	0·2
Culmore Road, Londonderry	0·4
Crossnadonnel, Limavady	0·3
T4 Improvements—Fourmile	0·2
—Sheepbridge	0·2
A2 Warrenpoint Road, Newry	0·2
Dunmurry Bypass: Stage 2C	1·8
Church Street/Scotch Street, Downpatrick	0·6
Strabane Bypass: Stage 1	2·2
Enniskillen Throughpass: Stage 3B	0·9

Moneyreagh (Street Lighting)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the adequacy of the street lighting at Moneyreagh village was last reviewed; and if he will arrange for a further review of street lighting at Moneyreagh.

Mr. Needham: The adequacy of street lighting in Moneyreagh village is monitored regularly and improvements are carried out when considered necessary, subject to the availability of finance. No specific review is planned.

Toll Bridges

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the figures for the *(a)* annual income and cost and *(b)* capital debt outstanding for toll bridges in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: There are no toll bridges in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hours per week the chairman works for Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.; what involvement he has in its day-to-day management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: This information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of the members of the Londonderry port and harbour commissioners; and if he will identify with which user firms of the port each of these persons is associated.

Mr. Needham: The membership is as follows:

J. T. Eaton (Chairman)
J. Doherty (Deputy Chairman)
M. G. Black
G. Craig
C. B. Doherty
Mrs. H. McClure
J. S. McIlvenny
C. Murray-Cavanagh
Councillor J. Tierney

No member of the board is associated with a user firm of the port.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will estimate the number of *(a)* employees in employment and *(b)* self-employed people in the Darlington constituency in June 1983, June 1987 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Jackson: Latest available constituency data for the self-employed relates to the population census for 1981.

Information available for employees in employment is from the periodic censuses of employment and is given in the table. No census was taken in 1983.

Employees in employment in the Darlington constituency

September of each year	*Number of employees*
1984	33,300
1987	34,100
[1]1989	36,700

[1] latest available

Youth Training

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to review the guarantee that all 16-year-olds with special needs in the north-west region will be offered a place if they so wish on any available youth training scheme.

Mr. Jackson: The YT guarantee assures young people, whether they have special training needs or not, the offer of a suitable training place. The Department's regional directors are in close touch with every training and enterprise council about the guarantee position in its area.

Where necessary, the Government have offered TECs additional support so that they can continue to meet the guarantee.

Seafarers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the provisions of employment legislation which exempt seafarers on vessels registered in the United Kingdom or Crown dependencies from the general provisions of such legislation.

Mr. Forth: Provisions which exclude seafarers of various descriptions in some circumstances from certain of the provisions of general employment legislation include:

Section 119 of the Employment Protection Act 1975
Section 10 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975
Sections 8 and 9 of the Race Relations Act 1976
Sections 141 and 144 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978
Section 30 of the Wages Act 1986
Paragraph 16 of schedule 1 of the Employment Act 1990

Merseyside TEC

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what amount of provision of training he will purchase from the Merseyside training and enterprise council in 1992-93.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* This is the subject of local negotiations. Therefore figures for 1992-93 are not available.

The Employment Department contract with Merseyside training and enterprise council for 1991-92 is made up of the following expenditure:

	£
Block 1	20,906,987
Block 2	12,960,897
Block 3	3,551,350
Block 4	1,205,303
Block 5	2,029,638
Total	40,654,170

Block 1 covers:	Youth Training and Education.
Block 2 covers:	Adult Training—Employment Training.
Block 3 covers:	Business and Enterprise.
Block 4 covers:	Other expenditure including local initiative fund activities, advertising and publicity etc.
Block 5 covers:	Management costs.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in North Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The Leeds and North Yorkshire area of the Employment Service and North Yorkshire training and enterprise council (TEC) have helped a wide range of people and businesses in North Yorkshire during 1991. The main achievements are set out as follows; those for the Employment Service cover the calendar year 1991; and for North Yorkshire TEC cover the period 1 April to 31 December 1991.

Employment Service achievements in North Yorkshire

Over 17,000 people placed into jobs;
Over 16,000 unemployed people interviewed and advised under the Restart and similar arrangements;
Over 1,100 unemployed people helped through nine Jobclubs.

North Yorkshire TEC

1,700 young people entered Youth Training;
Over 2,100 unemployed people entered employment training;
1,000 unemployed people entered the enterprise allowance scheme;
Help under a range of special initiatives, including a Centre for Training and Development, Business Development Projects, Women into Enterprise, and Access into Management.

Employment Service expenditure in North Yorkshire is not available. The expenditure of the North Yorkshire TEC in the calendar year is not available; the TEC budget for financial year 1991-92 is £18·03 million.

Information is not available for 1979 and 1980.

Other services and facilities of this Department, such as the wages inspectorate and the redundancy payments service, are also available in North Yorkshire but cannot be separated out.

SCOTLAND

Data (Personal Health Information)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he intends to take with regard to the code of practice on the confidentiality of personal health information in the light of the seventh report of the Data Protection Registrar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My officials have arranged a meeting with the Data Protection Registrar's department to discuss the matters raised in the report. There are no plans at present to amend the code of practice but the concerns of the Data Protection Registrar will be taken into account in any future revision of the code.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to allow patients, consumers and parents to consent to, or to be aware of, those uses and disclosures of personal information that are not obvious at the time the citizen provides the information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Personal information contained in health records is primarily for the health care of patients. Advice to patients on other uses which may be made of such information is already contained in some hospital admission booklets. It is planned to extend this practice to all hospital admission booklets and guidance on this will be issued to health boards and NHS trusts.

There are no plans to extend the restrictions on the use of the information contained in a pupil's progress record as set out in regulation 10(3) of the School General (Scotland) Regulations 1975.

Consumer affairs are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Diabetes

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the action taken by health boards in response to the report produced by the working group of the national medical consultants committee on the management of diabetes in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Comprehensive information is not available about action taken by health boards as a direct response to the recommendations made in 1987 by the National Medical Consultative Committee working group on diabetes. Clinical audit which is supported by specific Government funding is now the principal mechanism employed to review and improve patient care in the whole range of settings and six health boards have reported 12 separate audit projects for diabetes in general practice and in hospitals and in shared care. Applications for two national projects to be led by the recently formed Scottish study group for the care of the young diabetic will shortly be considered for funding. A third project involving health boards in the central belt of Scotland is under discussion.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives from the British Diabetic Association; what matters were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no records of my right hon. Friend meeting representatives from the British Diabetic Association in recent years.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give, for each health board, the number of consultant diabetic physicians per head of the population.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is given in the table.

Consultants in Endocrinology and Diabetes at 30 September 1991

Health board	*Number (whole-time equivalents)*	*Rate per 100,000 population*
Greater Glasgow	3	0·32
Lothian	1	0·13
Tayside	1	0·25

Notes:

1. Data are provisional.
2. All the consultants are whole time.
3. All other boards have no diabetes consultants.
4. Information collected centrally records only the main specialty of a doctor. The above figures therefore do not include general physicians who have a special interest in endocrinology or diabetes.

Assisted Places

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has decided on the level of fee remission grant which will be available to parents under the assisted places scheme in school session 1992-93.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend is making £9·6 million available for fee remission in 1992-93. Fifty-eight schools across Scotland will participate in the scheme. The funding now available should increase the number of pupils benefiting to the planned level of about 3,000 by the end of the session.

Blood

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many donations of blood were taken by the National Blood Transfusion Service in Scotland, in each year from 1978 to the latest year available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The number of donations taken in each year since 1978 was:

Year ending 31 March	*Number of donations*
1978	284,358
1979	284,184
1980	279,653
1981	286,230
1982	281,904
1983	284,248
1984	298,945
1985	307,356
1986	299,023
1987	285,866
1988	259,991
1989	266,259
1990	275,565
1991	291,819

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many transfers of *(a)* blood and *(b)* blood products were performed by the national health service in Scotland in each year from 1978 to the latest year available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Information on transfers performed is not available in the form requested. Figures of blood and blood products supplied by the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service to hospitals for use in each year was as follows:

Major products supplied

Year ending 31 March	*Whole blood (donations)*	*Red cell concentrate (donations)*	*Factor VIII (vials)*	*Factor IX (vials)*	*Albumin (bottles)*
1978	138,988	106,169	7,733	3,681	26,943
1979	138,740	115,623	8,346	2,761	24,904
1980	135,239	129,350	10,053	3,273	37,979
1981	121,365	143,796	18,154	2,875	39,406
1982	98,405	173,550	19,518	2,998	43,335
1983	81,581	185,543	24,890	3,381	56,065
1984	61,655	204,325	30,345	4,293	62,486
1985	57,953	210,069	35,732	4,761	64,555
1986	41,021	220,602	29,176	3,275	65,044
1987	26,407	222,570	37,243	1,013	77,752
1988	19,210	221,025	52,204	9,614	100,272
1989	22,454	237,144	41,335	9,160	95,057
1990	11,704	256,361	42,798	7,812	89,060
1991	9,210	278,300	52,023	8,689	89,306

Training

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been the numbers on employment training and youth training schemes in Scotland in each of the past five years.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]*: The information requested is set out in the table.

Employment training and youth training scheme/youth training in training in Scotland 1987 to 1991

Date	*Employment training*	*YTS/Youth training*
March 1987	[1]—	38,000
March 1988	[1]—	46,000
March 1989	21,200	49,800
March 1990	26,400	45,100
March 1991	25,200	[2]37,000

[1] Not collected—employment training programme did not start until September 1988.

[2] Excludes figures for the national providers unit provision.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has about the financial contribution of employers to youth training and employment training.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]*: My right hon. Friend does not seek to obtain detailed information about financial contributions made by employers, either in money or in kind, to the youth training or employment training programmes. It is in the interest of employers to contribute towards training costs and they are encouraged by local enterprise companies to do so. Furthermore, local enterprise companies work to maximise employer contributions through their contracts with providers.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many people in Scotland are currently on youth training and employment training schemes;

(2) if he will make a statement on the arrangements made for the independent national monitoring of the quality of youth training and employment training schemes;

(3) how many people on youth training and employment training schemes in Scotland have employee status.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]*: In Scotland responsibility for monitoring the delivery of youth training and employment training rests with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have asked the chairmen of these two bodies to write to the hon. Member with the information that he has requested about the numbers and status of people on the youth training and employment training schemes.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of *(a)* persons aged 16 years and *(b)* persons aged 17 years who are on youth training schemes are classified as special needs trainees; and how the numbers and percentages have changed in the years that youth training has been in operation.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 20 December 1991]*: For years 1986-87 to 1989-90 it is not possible to identify precisely by age the numbers and percentages of trainees with special training needs in Scotland. However, it is possible to identify the numbers of trainees in respect of which payments to providers were made at rates equivalent to special training needs rates. These numbers will include some payments made in respect of trainees who did not have special training needs and will contain instances of double counting. On this basis for each of the years the estimated number and proportion of trainees for whom payments at special training needs rates were made are:

	Trainees aged 16 years		*Trainees aged 17 years*	
	Estimated number	*Per cent.*	*Estimated number*	*Per cent.*
1986-87	105	0·4	56	1·0
1987-88	117	0·5	61	1·1
1988-89	167	0·7	94	1·2
1989-90	1,403	6·7	364	5·7

No information is available about payments made to providers in respect of trainees with special training needs in 1990-91; and Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise do not collect data on special needs trainees broken down by age. That information will therefore not be available for 1991-92 and later years.

Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise are required to collect data on the total number of trainees with special needs. The proportion of Youth Training starts by trainees who have special training needs which are expected this year, and the targets which have been set for 1992-93, are as follows:

	1991-92 (per cent.)	*1992-93 (per cent.)*
Scottish Enterprise	19	20
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	21	21

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many youth training placements in electrical and electronic engineering in Scotland went *(a)* to young men and *(b)* to young women; and if he will provide comparable figures for health, community and personal services placements.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I regret that this information is not available.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time *(a)* male and *(b)* female jobs there were in Scotland in June 1979; and how many there are now.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]*: For the years requested it is not possible to obtain separate figures for a number of male full-time employees. Figures are available for the total number of male employees. In June 1979 there were 1,205,191 male employees in employment. In June 1991 there were 1,014,677 male employees in employment. There were 565,202 full-time female employees in employment in June 1979 and 529,763 full-time female employees in employment in June 1991.

Medical Facilities (Western Isles)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether any consideration is being given to the construction or development of new medical facilities in the Uists or Benbecula.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* This is a matter for the board.

Self-employment

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many self-employed people there have been in Scotland each quarter since 1979.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The information is available on the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library. Library staff are ready to assist in accessing the information if necessary.

Health Services (Remote Areas)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Scottish Health Advisory Council working group on the provision of health services to remote and island areas will extend its deadline for submissions beyond 31 January; and whether it intends to seek submissions from local health councils.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Evidence was requested on behalf of the working group in a letter sent on 3 December 1991 to a number of statutory bodies and organisations, including the Association of Scottish Local Health Councils. The letter asked for responses by 31 January 1992, and requested recipients foreseeing difficulty in meeting this deadline to advise the group's secretary accordingly.

The association is currently undertaking consultation with local health councils and hopes to submit evidence to the group by the end of March, or failing that, by the end of April.

In addition to the collection of written evidence, the group plans to visit the areas covered by its remit, including the Western Isles. The visit programmes will include both formal meetings with representatives of the health service and open sessions for members of the local community.

Manufacturing

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many manufacturing jobs there were in each region of Scotland in June and December of every year since 1979.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The information requested is available only from the census of employment which is conducted by the Employment Department. The census of employment is not carried out annually. Information is given in the table for the years in the required period in which a census of employment was conducted.

Total employees in employment by Scottish region 1981, 1984, 1987, 1989

Region	*Manufacturing employees in employment* 1981	1984	1987	1989
Borders	12,940	12,610	12,260	12,010
Central	31,090	22,780	23,080	23,450
Dumfries and Galloway	12,240	11,300	10,920	11,790
Fife	39,980	35,810	32,610	32,730
Grampian	36,780	35,230	34,130	36,220
Highland	12,410	10,220	9,020	9,680
Lothian	66,200	55,300	56,130	55,530
Strathclyde	249,840	215,350	194,890	187,880
Tayside	37,050	32,090	31,010	31,090
Islands	3,330	2,960	2,900	2,110
Scotland	501,790	433,690	406,950	402,480

Source: Employment Department Census of Employment.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Deficit

18. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the figures for the United Kingdom trade deficit in the last three quarters for which the adjusted figures are available.

Mr. Redwood: United Kingdom current account trade deficits in the second, third and fourth quarters of 1991 were £145 million, £1,342 million and £1,585 million respectively.

Industrial Policy

22. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet representatives of the northern region CBI to discuss industrial policy.

Mr. Lilley: I next plan to meet representatives of the northern region CBI later this month to discuss a range of business matters.

Innovation

23. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the new innovation unit within his Department.

Mr. Leigh: I am pleased to inform my hon. Friend that DTI's innovation unit, launched last October by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, is proceeding well with its task of promoting innovation as the key to wealth creation. On 18 December last year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the appointment of five top business men to the unit. All five have hands-on experience of innovation in industry and will use that experience to deal directly with firms, higher education institutes, schools and local media.

32. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from business men about the introduction by his Department of the Spur scheme, for innovation by small and medium-sized enterprises.

Mr. Leigh: Business response to Spur (Support for Products Under Research) has been most positive and to date 90 offers of grant have been made to companies throughout Great Britain. The scheme has also been warmly welcomed by the Confederation of British Industry, the independent Advisory Council on Science and Technology (ACOST) and the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology.

Kuwait

24. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Britain's share of the Kuwaiti market since the end of the Gulf war.

Mr. Lilley: According to the information we have, Britain regained its pre-Gulf war OECD market share within two months of the end of hostilities. Our exports to Kuwait increased in value by nearly 30 per cent. in the second half of 1991 compared with the second half of 1989 (the most recent comparable period). United Kingdom companies gained at least £500 million worth of reconstruction business in Kuwait last year. The United Kingdom is now Kuwait's largest European supplier.

Manufactured Exports

25. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's share of manufactured exports by developed nations over the last five years.

33. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's share of manufactured exports by developed nations over the last five years.

Mr. Leigh: As the table shows, the United Kingdom's share of total OECD exports of manufactured goods increased during the period 1985-90. Our share has been broadly stable since the early 1980s, after decades of decline.

United Kingdom share of the value of the OECD's exports of manufactured goods

	Percentage
1985	7·2
1986	7·0
1987	7·4
1988	7·6
1989	7·5
1990	7·8

Sources: United Nations Monthly Bulletin, OECD International Monetary Fund, DTI.

Manufacturing Industry

26. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet the president of the CBI to discuss manufacturing industry.

Mr. Lilley: Ministers and officials of my Department keep in touch with the CBI on a wide range of business matters. I next plan to meet representatives of the CBI on 19 February.

27. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to assist British manufacturing industry to become more cost-effective and competitive.

Mr. Redwood: Over the last 10 years British manufacturing industry has increased its productivity by over a half and its exports by over two-thirds, faster than any of our major competitors. I plan to ensure that these substantial improvements in competitiveness are sustained by continuing to improve the climate in which British business operates, by reducing burdens on business and stimulating investment, innovation and the spread of best practice, by encouraging vigorous competition at home and by working for trade liberalisation and promoting our exports world wide.

30. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will meet representatives of the east midlands regional CBI to discuss policy towards manufacturing industry.

Mr. Lilley: Ministers and officials of my Department keep in touch with the CBI on a wide range of business matters.

Engineering

28. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next hopes to meet representatives of the engineering sector to discuss exports.

Mr. Lilley: My DTI ministerial colleagues and I have frequent contacts with representatives of the engineering industry on a range of matters.

Regional Policy

29. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet representatives of the European Commission to discuss regional policy.

Mr. Leigh: I have at present no plans for such a discussion.

Manufacturing Balance of Trade

31. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when Britain last had a surplus on its manufacturing trade; and what forecast he has made of the manufacturing trade balance for the future.

Mr. Redwood: Britain last had a surplus on its manufacturing trade in 1982. Since 1982 the value of United Kingdom exports of manufactures has increased by 131 per cent. My Department does not make forecasts of the trade balance.

Self-catering Accommodation

34. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to be in a position to respond to the concerns of those involved in the self-catering accommodation sector over EC guidelines with regard to fabric content standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Commission decided, in May 1991 to suspend work on the draft EC Directive on the Fire Behaviour of Upholstered Furniture pending further research into the fire characteristics of materials used in furniture and into test methods. The purpose of this research, as discussed at a consultative meeting in Brussels on 29 January, is to support requirements imposing limits on the burning behaviour of upholstered furniture and the associated emission of smoke and toxic gases. We have made it clear to the Commission that we will retain our Furniture Regulations until a regime consistent with the level of protection in the United Kingdom is available under the directive.

As a quite separate issue, the application of the United Kingdom's Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations to self-catering holiday accommodation has necessitated a wide-ranging review of the legal position with the involvement of other Departments. I am consulting with colleagues about a possible way forward and I hope to be able to make some positive proposals shortly.

Regional Assistance (North-east England)

35. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on regional assistance for the north-east of England.

Mr. Leigh: Of the four North-East region counties, Cleveland, Durham, and Tyne and Wear have assisted area status, as does the Morpeth and Ashington travel-to-work area in Northumberland. For 1990-91, expenditure on regional selective assistance, regional enterprise grants, regional development grants and by English Estates in the region amounted to £84 million. In addition, £97 million has been committed between 1989 and 1991 under ERDF programmes for the region, which also has access to ECSC loans.

Telephone Boxes

36. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with OFTEL relating to the increase in the number of working telephone boxes since 1987.

Mr. Redwood: I meet the Director General of OFTEL from time to time to discuss a wide range of telecommunications issues. I welcome the fact that BT now has approximately 100,000 public telephone boxes compared to 78,000 in 1987, and that 96 per cent. are in working order compared to 77 per cent. in 1987. There are also approximately 5,000 Mercury telephone boxes of which 98 per cent. are in working order.

Manufacturing Output

37. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to boost manufacturing output.

Mr. Lilley: The reduction of inflation is the precondition of renewed sustainable growth.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has recently received about manufacturing output.

Mr. Lilley: I have received the recent excellent report by the CBI's manufacturing advisory group which showed that there has been a transformation for the better in manufacturing performance during the 1980s.

Bicycles

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the British bicycle industry about Chinese imports; and what action he has taken to maintain fair trade in bicycles.

Mr. Redwood: I have received a number of such representations. The European Commission is currently investigating an anti-dumping complaint brought by the European industry against imports from China. The case for introducing a Community-wide import quota is also under consideration. The treatment of Chinese bicycles under the Community's generalised scheme of preferences is kept under review.

Perfume Exports

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of imports and exports of perfumes for each of the last five years defined by country.

Mr. Redwood: The available information is given in the following table. The value of United Kingdom exports in 1991, £62 million, was 3 per cent. higher than in 1990, while imports fell by 5 per cent. to £116 million.

United Kingdom Trade in Perfumes and Toilet Waters[1]
(Countries ranked by 1991 trade)
Imports, £ million

Country	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
France	68·7	73·0	83·4	66·1
United States of America	6·7	12·7	11·6	14·7
Netherlands	2·5	4·2	6·4	8·0
Germany[2]	10·0	2·2	3·3	6·2
Switzerland	6·6	5·2	6·2	5·1
Others	10·1	10·6	11·0	16·2
Total	104·7	107·9	121·9	116·2

Exports, £ million

Country	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
France	4·8	7·0	11·6	9·2
Germany[2]	5·9	4·9	5·7	6·3
United States of America	1·8	3·3	5·2	6·0
Italy	4·8	4·4	5·3	3·7
Saudi Arabia	3·3	4·5	4·5	3·2
Irish Republic	2·2	1·7	1·7	2·7
Dubai	1·4	1·5	1·6	2·6
Others	29·7	26·8	24·6	28·4
Total	54·0	54·1	60·3	61·9

[1] Perfumes and toilet waters are defined as item 553·1 of the Standard International Trade Classification, Revision 3.

[2] Germany includes the former East Germany throughout.

Source: Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on negotiations concerning intellectual property rights in respect of perfumes during the current GATT round.

Mr. Lilley: The Government welcome the progress made in the GATT Uruguay round negotiations on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPs). The GATT Director-General's proposals for improved international rules for the protection and enforcement of all main forms of intellectual property should benefit United Kingdom trading interests. The perfume industry stands to benefit particularly from his proposals for strengthened multilateral rules to combat trade in counterfeit goods and to protect undisclosed trade information.

Computer Misuse

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce proposals to amend the Computer Misuse Act 1990 to take into account the effect of viruses and hackers on databases where electronic data interchange is in use.

Mr. Leigh: The Secretary of State has no plans to introduce proposals to amend the Computer Misuse Act 1990. Since the passing of that Act, the DTI has monitored its application, and has not identified any features of electronic data interchange which would indicate the need for such amendment.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will investigate the fees charged by Touche Ross with regard to the Bank of Credit and Commerce International with a view to introducing further safeguards for creditors.

Mr. Redwood: I set out in a reply on 20 January at column *58*, the means by which a liquidator's remuneration must be approved, that is by the creditors acting either through a liquidation committee or in general meeting, with recourse available to the court. In the case of BCCI, this procedure will apply to the remuneration of Touche Ross as liquidators after 14 January 1992, the date of the winding up order. The procedure provides safeguards in control by the creditors who have a financial interest and by the courts who are independent of the liquidator.

The Secretary of State does not have a role in deciding the amount of remuneration which should be paid, but has the power if necessary to audit a liquidator's accounts in order to ensure that the approved amount has been drawn.

The remuneration of Touche Ross as provisional liquidators, that is up to 14 January, must be approved by the court and I understand that their bill will shortly be lodged with the court for approval.

Environmental Claims

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures the Government are taking to monitor and control false and misleading environmental claims on products sold in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh: Environmental claims about goods and services are generally subject to the provisions of the Trade Descriptions Act, 1968. Enforcement is the responsibility of local trading standards officers.

House of Fraser

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list for each of the regulatory bodies to which copies of the inspectors' report on House of Fraser were sent prior to, or at the time of, publication, and the conclusions each body has reported to him on that report.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* My predecessor sent copies of the inspectors' report to the following regulatory bodies: the Bank of England, the takeover panel, the Law Society, the Securities and Investments Board, the Securities Association and FIMBRA. Copies were disclosed to the Bank of England and the takeover panel prior to publication of the report. The remaining bodies were passed copies on publication.

My Department's memoranda of November and December 1990 to the Trade and Industry Committee gave information on action taken at that time by regulatory bodies following their consideration of the House of Fraser report. These were published in March 1991. Subsequently the following further information has become available.

For the Bank of England the Governor gave evidence to the Committee in 1991. FIMBRA has informed the Department that it has nothing to add to the evidence given to the Committee by the Bank of England, which is the lead regulator for Harrods Bank.

As for the Solicitors Complaints Bureau, as set out in my Department's December 1990 memorandum the report of the solicitors instructed by the Law Society to consider the part played by Herbert Smith in the matters dealt with in the inspectors' report was considered by the adjudication committee in November 1990. The adjudication committee considered that there was no evidence of professional misconduct by Herbert Smith.

The same report was considered in January 1991 by the standards and guidance committee of the Law Society, responsible for setting professional standards. That Committee considered that there was no evidence to justify changes to the solicitors' practice rules or to the principles contained in the Guide to the Professional Conduct of Solicitors. The committee was of the view that any guidance on the issues raised by the House of Fraser case should be by way of "best practice", and as such was a matter for the relevant specialist committee, that is the company law committee.

The company law committee, which is composed of specialist practitioners engaged in private practice, commerce and industry, has set out its views on the company law issues raised by the inspectors' report in the Law Society's memorandum submitted to the Trade and Industry Committee in April 1990. The company law committee had no comments to make on the conduct or regulatory issues raised by the case. The Committee is of the view that professional conduct guidance on such a technical area of practice would be inappropriate. In practice the lessons to be learnt from cases such as House of Fraser will have been incorporated into the internal practice procedures adopted by the large City firms involved in such takeovers and mergers. On that basis, the committee was therefore content to let the matter rest.

The takeover panel has informed my Department that on 23 January 1992 the High Court dismissed the Fayed brothers' application for leave for judicial review of the decisions of the panel and its appeal committee in December 1991 not to grant an adjournment of the hearing of disciplinary charges being brought against the Fayed brothers by the panel executive. The decision of the High Court is subject to an appeal by the Fayeds.

Small Firms Merit Award

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many companies, by standard planning region, who were successful under the small firms merit award for research and technology stage I, were successful in stage II;

(2) how many applications he received from companies in each standard planning region under the small firms merit award for research and technology stage II; how many were approved in each region; and how many had been successful in stage I.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The stage 2 SMART competition is open only to those who won stage 1 the previous year. Firms unsuccessful in stage 1 cannot enter stage 2. In 1991 there were 134 entries for the stage 2 competition, 103 of which have been successful as follows:

Region/territory	*Number of entries*	*Number successful*
East	14	10
East Midlands	16	11
North East	5	4
Northern Ireland	4	4
North West	11	9
Scotland	16	13
South East	22	12
South West	14	12
Wales	12	11
West Midlands	11	9
Yorkshire and Humberside	9	8

Research and Development

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list by travel-to-work areas the amounts of money allocated to companies from his Department's research and development budget.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The following is, for each of the last two completed financial years and the current year to date, a breakdown by DTI region and travel-to-work area, of DTI innovation budget grants paid to companies.

Please note, however, that the majority of the innovation budget is devoted to support for collaborative R and D projects where payments are made to one of the participating organisations (project leader) who distributes the grant to the other collaborators on the DTI's behalf. In these cases only one travel-to-work area is recorded on the DTI's database, but much of the money shown to be going to a particular travel-to-work area will be passed on to other companies, in other travel-to-work areas and possibly in other regions.

Department of Trade and Industry innovation grants paid to companies in 1989-90

Region and travel-to-work area	*Amount paid (£)*
East Midlands	
Boston	12,500
Burton-on-Trent	48,249
Chesterfield	8,092
Derby	15,420
Gainsborough	147,037
Leicester	90,363
Lincoln	14,309
Loughborough and Coalville	94,191
Mansfield	2,603
Matlock	70,296
Northampton	923,931
Nottingham	361,565
Rugby and Daventry	26,676
Worksop	6,261
North East	
Alnwick and Amble	25,000
Bishop Auckland	19,545
Darlington	8,925
Durham	63,211
Hartlepool	74,537
Hexham	11,282
Middlesbrough	326,886
Morpeth and Ashington	55,297
Newcastle upon Tyne	460,653
South Tyneside	35,275
Stockton-on-Tees	516,838
Sunderland	130,183
Northern Ireland	
Belfast	169,218
Coleraine	12,500
Craigavon	51,781
Omagh	8,147
North West	
Accrington and Rossendale	62,931
Barrow-in-Furness	19,773
Blackburn	24,676
Blackpool	8,635
Bolton and Bury	35,374
Burnley	16,583
Crewe	68,898
Hexham	26,838
Liverpool	215,731
Macclesfield	407,481
Manchester	1,884,748
Northwich	5,676
Preston	139,309
Sheffield	14,733
Warrington	33,994
Widnes and Runcorn	50,572
Wigan and St. Helens	117,479
Wirral and Chester	186,162
Workington	26,163
Scotland	
Aberdeen	133,236
Ayr	77,627
Bathgate	155,756
Dumbarton	15,634
Dundee	9,032
Dunoon and Bute	9,487
Edinburgh	391,596
Glasgow	183,908
Greenock	12,500
Haddington	12,500
Invergordon and Dingwall	19,375
Inverness	31,061
Kelso and Jedburgh	2,551
Kirkcaldy	14,637
Lanarkshire	23,015
Perth	17,070
Skye and Wester Ross	8,414
St. Andrews	25,000
Stirling	27,320
South East	
Andover	36,158
Aylesbury and Wycombe	442,225
Banbury	0
Basingstoke and Alton	58,278
Bedford	119,730
Brighton	97,663
Cambridge	649,306
Canterbury	8,339
Chelmsford and Braintree	501,076
Chichester	63,682
Colchester	114,124
Crawley	1,480,580
Eastbourne	7,249
Great Yarmouth	284,587
Guildford and Aldershot	883,189

Region and travel-to-work area	*Amount paid (£)*
Hastings	221,996
Haverhill	25,667
Heathrow	1,577,484
Hertford and Harlow	750,976
Hitchin and Letchworth	49,140
Huntingdon and St. Neots	63,099
Ipswich	44,919
Isle of Wight	58,713
London	3,278,634
Lowestoft	1,875
Medway and Maidstone	206,215
Milton Keynes	8,585
Newbury	271,720
Newmarket	54,686
Norwich	443,746
Oxford	1,901,148
Peterborough	188,607
Portsmouth	232,383
Reading	351,403
Slough	622,636
Southampton	60,560
Southend	122,119
Sudbury	8,025
Thanet	16,109
Tunbridge Wells	22,830
Watford and Luton	122,515
Winchester and Eastleigh	114,718
Wisbech	4,582
Woodbridge and Leiston	114,474
Worthing	95,211
South West	
Barnstaple and Infracombe	33,720
Bath	285,027
Bournemouth	26,053
Bristol	497,207
Chard	74,652
Cheltenham	0
Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye	42,152
Cirencester	111,369
Devizes	24,252
Dorchester and Weymouth	19,137
Evesham	74,268
Falmouth	15,129
Honiton and Axminster	32,509
Launceston	12,500
Plymouth	141,473
Poole	187,824
Shaftesbury	12,449
South Molton	18,008
Stroud	122,672
Swindon	118,420
Taunton	125,476
Torbay	26,303
Trowbridge and Frome	43,954
Truro	13,371
Wareham and Swanage	19,375
Yeovil	24,925
Wales	
Aberdare	26,304
Aberystwyth	36,038
Bangor and Caernarfon	56,266
Cardiff	252,928
Carmarthen	20,035
Conwy and Colwyn	7,776
Denbigh	32,250
Holyhead	9,846
Llanelli	12,500
Merthyr and Rhymney	28,162
Monmouth	25,000
Neath and Port Talbot	18,796
Newport	18,384
Pontypridd and Rhondda	783
Porthmadog and Ffestiniog	19,930
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	23,874
Swansea	94,815
Wrexham	12,242
West Midlands	
Birmingham	1,348,247
Burton-on-Trent	2,745
Coventry and Hinckley	277,951
Dudley and Sandwell	292,395
Evesham	77,141
Hereford and Leominster	30,655
Kidderminster	66,716
Leek	14,616
Malvern and Ledbury	41,322
Rugby and Daventry	1,784,508
Stafford	85,488
Stoke	48,613
Walsall	32,335
Warwick	49,341
Whitchurch and Market Drayton	12,500
Wolverhampton	54,375
Worcester	23,866
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Bradford	221,890
Calderdale	5,958
Doncaster	220,367
Harrogate	85,307
Hull	1,097,784
Leeds	649,752
Malton	21,400
Richmondshire	3,166
Ripon	10,125
Rotherham and Mexborough	41,829
Scarborough and Filey	41,485
Scunthorpe	37,175
Sheffield	213,782
Thirsk	26,648
Wakefield and Dewsbury	21,292
York	57,073

DTI innovation grants paid to companies in 1990-91

Region and travel to work area	*Amount paid £*
East Midlands	
Bicester	21,797
Boston	8,975
Burton-on-Trent	21,439
Corby	25,000
Derby	61,629
Gainsborough	16,121
Kettering and Market Harborough	22,233
Leicester	208,042
Lincoln	18,935
Loughborough and Coalville	197,256
Mansfield	16,113
Matlock	19,150
Northampton	248,134
Nottingham	349,521
Wellingborough and Rushden	8,705
Worksop	1,362
North East	
Alnwick and Amble	50,000
Bishop Auckland	17,955
Durham	35,833
Hartlepool	54,210
Middlesbrough	84,370
Morpeth and Ashington	86,673
Newcastle upon Tyne	364,740
South Tyneside	4,865
Stockton-on-Tees	94,806
Sunderland	145,448
Northern Ireland	
Belfast	205,252
Coleraine	25,000

Region and travel to work area	*Amount paid* £
Craigavon	14,244
Newry	28,435
North West	
Accrington and Rossendale	29,723
Barrow-in-Furness	33,040
Blackburn	40,016
Blackpool	24,880
Bolton and Bury	26,899
Burnley	20,711
Crewe	41,091
Kendal	12,500
Lancaster and Morecambe	36,403
Liverpool	114,216
Macclesfield	249,342
Manchester	1,710,431
Northwich	17,493
Preston	121,698
Rochdale	19,344
Sheffield	31,121
Warrington	25,000
Widnes and Runcorn	131,225
Wigan and St. Helens	48,768
Wirral and Chester	60,589
Workington	31,966
Scotland	
Aberdeen	109,247
Ayr	119,373
Bathgate	31,000
Dumbarton	12,500
Dunoon and Bute	18,750
Edinburgh	360,628
Glasgow	219,505
Greenock	36,190
Haddington	25,000
Invergordon and Dingwall	60,625
Inverness	16,497
Kilmarnock	12,500
Kirkcaldy	47,006
Lanarkshire	11,482
Oban	8,350
Perth	6,809
St. Andrews	60,126
Stirling	11,634
South East	
Andover	25,389
Aylesbury and Wycombe	704,964
Basingstoke and Alton	50,941
Bedford	95,061
Brighton	91,097
Cambridge	904,143
Canterbury	3,052
Chelmsford and Braintree	54,588
Chichester	20,839
Crawley	223,136
Cromer and North Walsham	6,897
Great Yarmouth	380,061
Guildford and Aldershot	707,543
Hastings	132,351
Haverhill	21,618
Heathrow	1,213,794
Hertford and Harlow	768,127
Huntingdon and St. Neots	48,772
Ipswich	57,379
Isle of Wight	35,000
London	2,472,532
Medway and Maidstone	147,234
Milton Keynes	132,506
Newbury	266,875
Newmarket	17,560
Norwich	294,410
Oxford	1,378,564
Peterborough	163,462
Portsmouth	253,856
Reading	287,316
Slough	841,322
Southampton	391,458
Southend	449,903
Sudbury	9,774
Swindon	22,899
Tunbridge Wells	19,115
Watford and Luton	150,331
Winchester and Eastleigh	154,347
Woodbridge and Leiston	180,700
Worthing	40,834
South West	
Barnstaple and Ilfracombe	54,457
Bath	166,117
Bournemouth	10,102
Bristol	1,744,611
Chard	22,860
Cheltenham	80,243
Chippenham	78,203
Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye	44,624
Cirencester	49,563
Dartmouth and Kingsbridge	12,500
Devizes	57,927
Dorchester and Weymouth	50,000
Evesham	49,073
Exeter	32,006
Falmouth	24,640
Gloucester	14,498
Honiton and Axminster	29,991
Launceston	21,578
Newton Abbot	19,070
Okehampton	16,950
Plymouth	210,057
Poole	45,296
Salisbury	35,388
South Molton	13,741
Stroud	182,660
Swindon	86,709
Taunton	34,952
Torbay	108,531
Trowbridge and Frome	27,644
Wareham and Swanage	5,170
Wells	22,010
Weston-super-Mare	57,327
Yeovil	13,500
Wales	
Aberytswyth	17,067
Bangor and Caernarfon	66,662
Blaenau Gwent Abergavenny	8,363
Bridgend	12,500
Cardiff	336,000
Carmarthen	37,405
Denbigh	25,000
Llandrindod Wells	18,750
Llanelli	44,096
Merthyr and Rhymney	7,888
Neath and Port Talbot	25,000
Newport	36,857
Pontypool and Cwmbran	38,167
Pontypridd and Rhondda	26,881
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	37,248
Swansea	201,882
Wrexham	16,604
West Midlands	
Birmingham	1,265,081
Coventry and Hinckley	319,019
Dudley and Sandwell	269,911
Evesham	129,437
Hereford and Leominister	74,132
Kidderminster	208,980
Malvern and Ledbury	51,288
Rugby and Daventry	735,074
Stafford	26,724
Stoke	228,938
Telford and Bridgnorth	23,411

Region and travel to work area	*Amount paid £*
Walsall	71,898
Warwick	141,095
Whitchurch and Market Drayton	9,103
Wolverhampton	23,091
Worcester	5,426
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley	20,767
Bradford	221,061
Doncaster	71,250
Harrogate	66,931
Hull	713,904
Leeds	533,085
Malton	26,282
Northallerton	14,644
Richmondshire	992
Rotherham and Mexborough	20,875
Scarborough and Filey	81,961
Scunthorpe	24,129
Sheffield	275,165
Whitby	23,579
York	20,525

DTI innovation grants paid to companies in 1991-92

Region and travel-to-work area	*Amount paid £*
East Midlands	
Alfreton and Ashfield	22,590
Bicester	13,201
Burton-on-Trent	16,062
Derby	115,040
Gainsborough	46,842
Grantham	15,000
Kettering and Market Harborough	28,767
Leicester	102,536
Lincoln	123,029
Loughborough and Coalville	336,580
Matlock	24,886
Northampton	536,007
Nottingham	353,599
Rugby and Daventry	125,000
Stamford	4,375
Wellingborough and Rushden	33,640
North East	
Durham	210,632
Hartlepool	7,742
Middlesbrough	30,712
Morpeth and Ashington	73,234
Newcastle upon Tyne	577,172
Stockton-on-Tees	39,783
Sunderland	70,508
Northern Ireland	
Belfast	223,122
Coleraine	42,500
Cookstown	27,182
Craigavon	49,519
Newry	24,911
North West	
Barrow-in-Furness	30,092
Blackburn	65,520
Blackpool	157,037
Bolton and Bury	6,917
Buxton	29,628
Carlisle	15,000
Crewe	47,203
Kendal	25,000
Lancaster and Morecambe	33,160
Liverpool	196,043
Macclesfield	137,416
Manchester	1,371,933
Northwich	29,917
Oldham	36,587
Rochdale	18,156
Sheffield	19,627
Warrington	21,401
Widnes and Runcorn	318,716
Wigan and St. Helens	15,000
Wirral and Chester	83,489
Scotland	
Aberdeen	166,513
Ayr	47,430
Badenoch	15,000
Bathgate	72,871
Dunoon and Bute	64,147
Edinburgh	325,647
Glasgow	222,395
Greenock	36,644
Haddington	8,725
Invergordon and Dingwall	7,500
Inverness	48,125
Kilmarnock	31,875
Kirkcaldy	78,868
Lanarkshire	21,878
Oban	15,000
Perth	1,202
Skye and Wester Ross	15,000
St. Andrews	76,724
Stirling	1,566
South East	
Andover	68,204
Aylesbury and Wycombe	258,419
Basingstoke and Alton	98,262
Bedford	111,698
Brighton	22,821
Cambridge	1,167,533
Canterbury	41,794
Chelmsford and Braintree	111,139
Chichester	10,809
Crawley	623,105
Diss	11,820
Great Yarmouth	15,181
Guildford and Aldershot	836,331
Hastings	22,672
Heathrow	622,538
Hertford and Harlow	586,180
Hitchin and Letchworth	27,535
Huntingdon and St. Neots	21,458
Ipswich	109,390
Isle of Wight	20,477
London	1,239,879
Medway and Maidstone	48,365
Milton Keynes	101,033
Newbury	233,995
Norwich	69,708
Oxford	663,369
Peterborough	184,786
Portsmouth	579,821
Reading	534,586
Slough	255,596
Southampton	389,374
Southend	61,101
Swindon	14,524
Tunbridge Wells	3,149
Watford and Luton	228,614
Winchester and Eastleigh	63,493
Woodbridge and Leiston	192,636
Worthing	62,964
South West	
Barnstaple and Ilfracombe	21,772
Bath	139,004
Bideford	15,000
Bridport	15,000
Bristol	469,251
Chard	6,032
Cheltenham	122,909
Chippenham	71,119
Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye	3,150
Cirencester	49,274

Region and travel-to-work area	*Amount paid £*
Dartmouth and Kingsbridge	19,375
Evesham	27,460
Exeter	38,041
Falmouth	73,393
Gloucester	15,000
Helston	15,000
Honiton and Axminster	54,572
Launceston	3,422
Newton Abbot	18,430
Okehampton	6,591
Penzance and St. Ives	21,359
Plymouth	207,492
Poole	57,036
Salisbury	53,086
South Molton	5,735
Stroud	108,946
Swindon	107,621
Taunton	54,841
Torbay	49,653
Trowbridge and Frome	59,960
Wells	20,504
Weston-Super-Mare	217,062
Yeovil	25,941
Wales	
Aberystwyth	13,347
Bangor and Caernarfon	28,059
Blaenau Gwent Abergavenny	24,296
Bridgend	25,000
Cardiff	301,562
Carmarthen	43,439
Conwy and Colwyn	44,312
Denbigh	32,820
Llandrindod Wells	18,750
Llanelli	65,954
Merthyr and Rhymney	76,217
Neath and Port Talbot	44,649
Newport	113,126
Newtown	25,469
Pontypool and Cwmbran	49,333
Pontypridd and Rhondda	10,619
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	57,680
Swansea	320,041
Wrexham	16,103
West Midlands	
Birmingham	794,440
Burton-on-Trent	8,288
Coventry and Hinckley	438,912
Dudley and Sandwell	83,981
Evesham	52,905
Hereford and Leominster	67,927
Kidderminster	5,625
Malvern and Ledbury	243,301
Oswestry	15,000
Rugby and Daventry	102,597
Stafford	23,622
Stoke	208,920
Telford and Bridgnorth	63,455
Walsall	30,602
Warwick	12,850
Wolverhampton	32,158
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley	38,377
Bradford	174,576
Bridlington and Driffield	14,815
Calderdale	164,627
Goole and Selby	18,099
Harrogate	90,647
Huddersfield	11,688
Hull	1,003,690
Leeds	587,587
Malton	27,983
Northallerton	28,009
Rotherham and Mexborough	26,338
Scarborough and Filey	155,244
Sheffield	127,840
Whitby	13,921
York	51,985

DTI innovation grants paid to companies in 1989-92

Region and travel to work area	*Amount paid £*
East Midlands	
Alfreton and Ashfield	22,590
Bicester	34,997
Boston	21,475
Burton-on-Trent	85,750
Chesterfield	8,092
Corby	25,000
Derby	192,089
Gainsborough	210,000
Grantham	15,000
Kettering and Market Harborough	51,000
Leicester	400,941
Lincoln	156,272
Loughborough and Coalville	628,028
Mansfield	18,716
Matlock	114,331
Northampton	1,708,072
Nottingham	1,064,685
Rugby and Daventry	151,676
Stamford	4,375
Wellingborough and Rushden	42,345
Worksop	7,623
North East	
Alnwick and Amble	75,000
Bishop Auckland	37,500
Darlington	8,925
Durham	309,676
Hartlepool	136,489
Hexham	11,282
Middlesbrough	441,968
Morpeth and Ashington	215,204
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,402,565
South Tyneside	40,140
Stockton-on-Tees	651,426
Sunderland	346,139
Northern Ireland	
Belfast	597,592
Coleraine	80,000
Cookstown	27,182
Craigavon	115,544
Newry	53,345
Omagh	8,147
North West	
Accrington and Rossendale	92,654
Barrow-in-Furness	82,905
Blackburn	130,212
Blackpool	190,552
Bolton and Bury	69,190
Burnley	37,294
Buxton	29,628
Carlisle	15,000
Crewe	157,192
Hexham	26,838
Kendal	37,500
Lancaster and Morecambe	69,563
Liverpool	525,989
Macclesfield	794,239
Manchester	4,967,112
Northwich	53,086
Oldham	36,587
Preston	260,997
Rochdale	37,500
Sheffield	65,481
Warrington	80,395
Widnes and Runcorn	500,513
Wigan and St. Helens	181,247
Wirral and Chester	330,240

Region and travel to work area	*Amount paid* £
Workington	58,129
Scotland	
Aberdeen	408,997
Ayr	244,429
Badenoch	15,000
Bathgate	259,627
Dumbarton	28,134
Dundee	9,032
Dunoon and Bute	92,384
Edinburgh	1,077,871
Glasgow	625,907
Greenock	85,334
Haddington	46,225
Invergordon and Dingwall	87,500
Inverness	95,683
Kelso and Jedburgh	2,551
Kilmarnock	44,375
Kirkcaldy	140,511
Lanarkshire	56,375
Oban	23,350
Perth	25,081
Skye and Wester Ross	23,414
St. Andrews	161,850
Stirling	40,521
South East	
Andover	129,750
Aylesbury and Wycombe	1,405,607
Banbury	0
Basingstoke and Alton	207,481
Bedford	326,489
Brighton	211,580
Cambridge	2,720,982
Canterbury	53,185
Chelmsford and Braintree	666,862
Chichester	95,329
Colchester	114,124
Crawley	2,326,821
Cromer and North Walsham	6,897
Diss	11,820
Eastbourne	7,249
Great Yarmouth	679,830
Guildford and Aldershot	2,427,063
Hastings	377,019
Haverhill	47,285
Heathrow	3,413,817
Hertford and Harlow	2,105,284
Hitchin and Letchworth	76,675
Huntingdon and St. Neots	133,329
Ipswich	211,688
Isle of Wight	114,190
London	6,991,045
Lowestoft	1,875
Medway and Maidstone	401,814
Milton Keynes	242,123
Newbury	772,590
Newmarket	72,246
Norwich	807,864
Oxford	3,943,081
Peterborough	536,856
Portsmouth	1,066,060
Reading	1,173,304
Slough	1,719,554
Southampton	841,392
Southend	633,124
Sudbury	17,799
Swindon	37,423
Thanet	16,109
Tunbridge Wells	45,094
Watford and Luton	501,459
Winchester and Eastleigh	332,557
Wisbech	4,582
Woodbridge and Leiston	487,811
Worthing	199,009
South West	
Barnstaple and Ilfracombe	109,950
Bath	590,148
Bideford	15,000
Bournemouth	36,155
Bridport	15,000
Bristol	2,711,069
Chard	103,544
Cheltenham	203,151
Chippenham	149,322
Cinderford and Ross-on-Wye	89,926
Cirencester	210,206
Dartmouth and Kingsbridge	31,875
Devizes	82,179
Dorchester and Weymouth	69,137
Evesham	150,801
Exeter	70,047
Falmouth	113,162
Gloucester	29,498
Helston	15,000
Honiton and Axminster	117,072
Launceston	37,500
Newton Abbot	37,500
Okehampton	23,540
Penzance and St. Ives	21,359
Plymouth	559,021
Poole	290,156
Salisbury	88,474
Shaftesbury	12,449
South Molton	37,485
Stroud	414,277
Swindon	312,751
Taunton	215,269
Torbay	184,487
Trowbridge and Frome	131,558
Truro	13,371
Wareham and Swanage	24,545
Wells	42,514
Weston-super-Mare	274,389
Yeovil	64,366
Wales	
Aberdare	26,304
Aberystwyth	66,453
Bangor and Caernarfon	150,987
Blaenau Gwent Abergavenny	32,659
Bridgend	37,500
Cardiff	890,490
Carmarthen	100,879
Conwy and Colwyn	52,088
Denbigh	90,070
Holyhead	9,846
Llandrindod Wells	37,500
Llanelli	122,550
Merthyr and Rhymney	112,267
Monmouth	25,000
Neath and Port Talbot	88,445
Newport	168,367
Newtown	25,469
Pontypool and Cwmbran	87,500
Pontypridd and Rhondda	38,283
Porthmadog and Ffestiniog	19,930
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	118,802
Swansea	706,738
Wrexham	44,949
West Midlands	
Birmingham	3,407,767
Burton-on-Trent	11,033
Coventry and Hinckley	1,035,882
Dudley and Sandwell	646,287
Evesham	259,483
Hereford and Leominster	172,714
Kidderminster	281,321
Leek	14,616
Malvern and Ledbury	335,911
Oswestry	15,000

Region and travel to work area	*Amount paid £*
Rugby and Daventry	2,622,180
Stafford	135,834
Stoke	486,471
Telford and Bridgnorth	86,866
Walsall	134,835
Warwick	203,286
Whitchurch and Market Drayton	21,603
Wolverhampton	109,624
Worcester	29,292
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley	59,144
Bradford	617,527
Bridlington and Driffield	14,815
Calderdale	170,585
Doncaster	291,617
Goole and Selby	18,099
Harrogate	242,885
Huddersfield	11,688
Hull	2,815,378
Leeds	1,790,424
Malton	75,664
Northallerton	42,654
Richmondshire	4,157
Ripon	10,125
Rotherham and Mexborough	89,041
Scarborough and Filey	278,690
Scunthorpe	61,304
Sheffield	616,788
Thirsk	26,648
Wakefield and Dewsbury	21,292
Whitby	37,500
York	129,582

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 February 1992

TRANSPORT

Eurocontrol

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of Eurocontrol.

Mr. McLoughlin: I believe that Eurocontrol has an increasingly important role as the key organisation in Europe for co-ordinating the planning of air traffic management and related research and development, and the collection of enroute air navigation charges. In particular, Eurocontrol will continue to be responsible for building and operating the central flow management unit; for the management of the European air traffic control harmonisation and integration programme, which is likely to be expanded shortly to include air traffic control systems at airports; and for the operation of the European co-ordination team to identify measures to improve air traffic control capacity in the short term.

Eurocontrol will be opening negotiations on an agreement on strengthened co-operation with the EC Commission. It will also be considering whether its convention is appropriate to meet its future needs.

Twelve states have signed the Eurocontrol convention to date, and 15 states are members of the Eurocontrol route charges system. A number of other states attend Eurocontrol meetings as observers. Transport Ministers of the European Civil Aviation Conference have encouraged those member states which have not yet applied for membership of Eurocontrol to do so at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to improve co-ordination and the work of Eurocontrol and the European Commission in respect of a pan-European air traffic control system, in order to avoid duplication.

Mr. McLoughlin: As the result of a United Kingdom proposal at the meeting of the permanent commission of Eurocontrol on 3 December 1991, Eurocontrol, in co-operation with both the EC Commission and member states of the European Civil Aviation Conference, will formulate an outline plan for the future air traffic management system of its member states. This initiative provides a valuable opportunity to avoid duplication of work. During the forthcoming United Kingdom presidency of the EC the Government will encourage the Commission to support fully Eurocontrol's work on the future system by providing increased support for research and trials.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the European air traffic control harmonisation and inspection programme; and what is the financial contribution by member states.

Mr. McLoughlin: Following a United Kingdom initiative, Transport Ministers of the member states of the European Civil Aviation Conference agreed in April 1990 a strategy under the title of the European air traffic control harmonisation and integration programme, and invited Eurocontrol to manage the programme. The first phase of this strategy, which has just been completed on time, consisted of a comprehensive assessment of the present arrangements for air traffic control in Europe. The second and third phases will comprise programme development and acquisition and implementation of new equipment. The final phase will consider the air traffic management system needed in the longer term.

On 17 March my right hon. and learned Friend will be chairing a meeting in London of Transport Ministers of ECAC member states, to consider further measures to reduce flight delays and cope with growth in air traffic. We expect the meeting to reach agreement on a major extension of the current strategy for air traffic control.

The programme's management costs are met by Eurocontrol, who estimate that these will be 5·8 million ecu per annum for 1992 onwards. Investment in the equipment necessary to implement the programme will be made by the participating ECAC member states.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the work being done by the Atlas study group on air traffic control in Europe, and on the costs incurred and how they are funded.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Atlas study is being carried out for the EC Commission. Its objective is to define and provide specifications for the creation of a single unified air traffic management system for European airspace. I understand that the cost of the study, which will be fully met by the Commission, is likely to be some 7·5 million ecu.

British Rail

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for transport if he will give a breakdown of British Rail's funding in 1990-91 and an estimate on the same basis for the current year.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows.

British Rail sources of funds

£ million cash

	1990-91	*1991-92*[1]
Requirements		
Investment	850	1,125
Operating losses	350	575
Interest	50	75
Total	1,250	1,775
Sources		
Borrowing	375	600
PSO grants	600	900
Level crossing grants	25	25
PTE Grants	100	125
Asset sales	125	75
Working capital	25	50
Total	1,250	1,775

[1] Estimate.

Notes:

1. All figures rounded to the nearest £25 million.

2. Operating losses exclude depreciation.
3. The external finance limit comprises borrowing and grants (other than PTE grants).

Speed Limits

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be consulting on proposals to revise the criteria for setting speed limits.

Mr. Chope: We have today begun consultation on proposals to make more flexible the criteria used for setting speed limits. The new criteria put greater weight on the local environment and should result in speed limits more closely reflecting local conditions. Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Library of the House.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in November 1988, the then Secretary of State took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. McLoughlin: The then Secretary of State's schedule does not indicate that he took part in any such activities.

ENVIRONMENT

Tyre Recycling

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the result of his monitoring of current initiatives to tackle the stockpiles of used tyres; whether he proposes to introduce tyre recycling targets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: A survey of licensed and unlicensed tyre dumps is now being conducted by a consultant on behalf of the Departments of the Environment and of Energy. It is hoped that results, which will be available later this year, will give a clearer indication of what action needs to be taken. No plans for tyre recycling targets exist at present but the United Kingdom is participating in a working group organised by the European Commission as a part of its priority waste stream exercise to examine the issue in a harmonised European manner.

Housing

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sources of referral to housing associations and the percentages that these nominations take up of housing associations stock for *(a)* the whole of England and Wales, *(b)* the north-east region and *(c)* Greater London.

Mr. Yeo: The latest available information relates to housing association lettings made in the first nine months of 1991:

Percentage of lettings

	England	[1]*North*	*Greater London*
Source of referral			
Local authority nomination	35	30	46
Statutory agency	2	1	1
Voluntary agency	3	1	9
Direct application	35	50	11
Mobility scheme	1	[2]—	2
Within the housing association	19	15	25
Other housing association	1	[2]—	2
Other	4	3	4
Total	100	100	100

Notes:

[1] North: Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham, and Cleveland.

[2] Less than 0·5 per cent.

Source: National Federation of Housing Associations.

For information on the position in Wales I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

National Parks (Transport)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what appraisal he has made of transport needs to and within each of the national parks.

Mr. Baldry: None. The appraisal of transport needs to and within the national parks falls to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and to the relevant local and highway authorities.

Noise

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the number of complaints regarding excessive noise made to local authorities in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Information is not available in the form requested. The Institution of Environmental Health Officers monitors the number of noise complaints received under the statutory nuisance procedures and records the number of remedies informally achieved or prosecutions carried out. This information appears in the "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics"—No. 13 of 1990—a copy of which has been placed in the Library. The statistics do not define "excessive noise".

Litter

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many members of the public have made and are making use of the anti-litter provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Baldry: The most recent information on intended or actual prosecutions was given in my answer to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on Friday 8 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *305*. The Tidy Britain Group, which receives grant in aid from my Department, is undertaking further surveys of local authorities to monitor the implementation of part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. We await the results of its latest survey.

Parish Councils

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the results of Aston business school's survey of parish councils.

Mr. Key: We have today published Aston business school's report entitled "Parish and Town Councils in England: A Survey". Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. A survey of the report has been sent to all the parish and town councils which took part in the research.

Bypasses

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment at what stage of the planning process his Department is consulted over new bypasses.

Mr. Yeo: In the cases of trunk road bypasses, the Department of Transport would invariably consult my Department at the earliest stages of developing route proposals.

Where the bypass is a proposal of the local highway authority, it should be subject to the statutory development plan procedures, and shown in the structure and local plan for the area. This is made clear in PPG 12, "Development Plans and Regional Guidance", published on 10 February 1992. My Department must be consulted at each stage in the process leading to the adoption of the plan. The Secretary of State intends to make a direction shortly, to ensure that he is notified of any local highway authority road scheme which has not been subject to local plan procedures, or is in conflict with the development plan.

Bristol Development Corporation

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by date created, firm and number of jobs, the jobs established by the Bristol development corporation.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* This information is not available in the form requested. The corporation's estimate of total employment in the Bristol urban development area, based upon consultants' surveys, was 14,000 jobs in January 1989 and 18,000 jobs at March 1991.

West Yorkshire Transport Museum

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he considered the application by the West Yorkshire transport museum for city grant; whether it has been approved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 12 February 1991]:* An application for city grant was received on 9 January and is currently under appraisal. A decision on the application will be made as soon as possible.

Stretton Magna Park

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will declare the whole of Stretton Magna park in Leicestershire a conservation area to protect the local flora and fauna.

Mr. Trippier: I am advised by English Nature that this area does not meet the criteria necessary for it to be notified by it as a site of special scientific interest. I understand that the area contains a number of species that are protected in their own right under the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Farmland Hedges

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to prevent the removal of hedges from farmland.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on Tuesday 3 December 1991, *Official Report,* column 79.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in north Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The main expenditure of the Department in north Yorkshire is through the revenue support grant system. In 1991-92, the total external support for local councils in north Yorkshire is just over £260 million. In addition the Department has allocated over £12·6 million to local housing authorities in north Yorkshire to support capital programmes expected to total about £24 million this year. The Department also provided revenue support for housing, funding for an estate action scheme of £2·75 million and energy efficiency schemes. Substantial sums are also available from the Housing Corporation funded directly by the Department. Comparable figures for 1979 are not readily available.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what data information systems the Lord Chancellor's Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's Department is currently developing and installing a computerised case management system for Crown court offices. No direct links from this system to other systems are planned, but data on court appearances currently provided to the Home Office on paper will in future be produced on magnetic media.

Other systems still in the planning stage are for a computerised database of statute law, and case management and accounting systems for the county courts, companies courts, and bankruptcy court.

All computer systems within the Lord Chancellor's Department comply fully with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984, as will all future systems.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The legal secretariat to the Law Officers operates a file-tracking system, but does not participate in external data information systems and has not been consulted with a view to such participation. There are no plans for any link with the police national computer or with any other computer system.

The Treasury Solicitor's department operates personnel, case-tracking and billing systems and has use of the LEXIS external data information system. There are no plans to link any of these systems to the police national computer or any other computer system.

The Crown prosecution services operates personnel, finance and a number of case-tracking systems. It has also agreed a new standard case-tracking system which is under development. The Crown prosecution service has subscribed to the LEXIS legal data base for a trial period. The criteria for inclusion in information systems are that the data should be necessary for operational, administrative or management purposes. The Crown prosecution service has no plans to link to the police national computer, but is discussing with other criminal justice agencies the possible automated exchange of the case data already passed in paper form for essential operational purposes.

The Serious Fraud Office operates personnel, case-tracking and document-controlled systems. There are no plans to link the systems to the police national computer or to any other external computer system.

The systems operated by each Department comply with the Data Protection Act 1984 and each Department is registered with the Data Protection Registrar.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Soley: To ask the Attorney-General if he will give the figures for county court orders for mortgage repossessions for 1990 and 1991, including the percentage increase, according to *(a)* standard economic region and *(b)* county.

The Attorney-General: The figures for the number of repossessions are not collected. The only information available on mortgage possessions is the number of actions entered and orders made in each county court. The table gives the information for 1990 and 1991 for each county and standard economic region and shows the respective percentage increases. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all of the orders made will have resulted in the execution of warrants of possession. At this stage the 1991 figures are provisional and therefore liable to revision in the future.

County Court mortgage possession actions entered

	1990	*1991*	*Percentage change*
Cleveland	1,149	1,578	37·3
Cumbria	700	965	37·9
Durham	1,165	1,661	42·6
Northumberland	219	413	88·6
Tyne and Wear	1,710	2,300	34·5
North	4,943	6,917	39·9
Humberside	2,422	3,006	24·1
North Yorkshire	1,030	1,430	38·8
South Yorkshire	2,513	3,375	34·3
West Yorkshire	4,469	6,335	41·8
Yorkshire and Humberside	10,434	14,146	35·6
Derbyshire	1,589	2,276	43·2
Leicestershire	2,098	2,569	22·4
Lincolnshire	1,466	1,869	27·5
Northamptonshire	2,603	2,991	14·9
Nottinghamshire	3,280	3,763	14·7
East Midlands	11,036	13,468	22·0
Cambridgeshire	2,443	2,650	8·5
Norfolk	1,631	1,829	12·1
Suffolk	1,484	1,758	18·5
East Anglia	5,558	6,237	12·2
Bedfordshire	2,089	2,930	40·3
Berkshire	3,284	3,789	15·4
Buckinghamshire	2,429	3,002	23·6
Essex	5,520	6,401	16·0
Greater London	29,291	35,416	20·9
Hampshire	5,026	6,801	35·3
Hertfordshire	2,304	3,076	33·5
Isle of Wight	319	408	27·9
Kent	6,273	7,727	23·2
Oxfordshire	1,154	1,528	32·4
Surrey	2,024	2,673	32·1
Sussex	5,251	6,275	19·5
South East	64,964	80,026	23·2
Avon	2,393	3,459	44·5
Cornwall	1,165	1,749	50·1
Devon	2,927	4,061	38·7
Dorset	2,248	2,716	20·8
Gloucestershire	1,050	1,379	31·3
Somerset	808	1,199	48·4
Wiltshire	1,618	2,131	31·7
South West	12,209	16,694	36·7
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	1,480	2,152	45·4
Salop	897	1,309	45·9
Staffordshire	2,505	3,224	28·7
Warwickshire	1,605	1,809	12·7
West Midlands	7,109	9,199	29·4
West Midlands	13,596	17,693	30·1
Cheshire	1,842	2,696	46·4
Greater Manchester	6,211	9,444	52·1
Lancashire	3,504	4,841	38·2
Merseyside	3,417	4,403	28·9
North West	14,974	21,384	42·8
Clwyd	689	1,054	53·0
Dyfed	706	983	39·2
Gwent	1,419	1,686	18·8
Gwynedd	720	807	12·1
Mid Glamorgan	1,820	2,388	31·2
Powys	91	229	151·6
South Glamorgan	1,198	1,626	35·7
West Glamorgan	993	1,462	47·2
Wales	7,636	10,235	34·0

County court mortgage possession suspended orders

	1990	*1991*	*Percentage change*
Cleveland	414	758	83·1
Cumbria	359	487	35·7
Durham	430	906	110·7
Northumberland	66	150	127·3
Tyne and Wear	728	1,067	46·6

	1990	1991	Percentage change
North	1,997	3,368	68·7
Humberside	605	1,330	119·8
North Yorkshire	287	447	55·7
South Yorkshire	840	1,208	43·8
West Yorkshire	1,270	2,118	66·8
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,002	5,103	70·0
Derbyshire	512	883	72·5
Leicestershire	917	948	3·4
Lincolnshire	532	557	4·7
Northamptonshire	802	893	11·3
Nottinghamshire	847	1,199	41·6
East Midlands	3,610	4,480	24·1
Cambridgeshire	558	695	24·6
Norfolk	441	754	71·0
Suffolk	421	542	28·7
East Anglia	1,420	1,991	40·2
Bedfordshire	720	1,034	43·6
Berkshire	793	1,497	88·8
Buckinghamshire	492	1,425	189·6
Essex	1,179	1,989	68·7
Greater London	12,076	12,842	6·3
Hampshire	2,291	3,431	49·8
Hertfordshire	711	961	35·2
Isle of Wight	156	221	41·7
Kent	2,027	3,061	51·0
Oxfordshire	436	476	9·2
Surrey	511	1,083	111·9
Sussex	1,796	2,045	13·9
South East	23,188	30,065	29·7
Avon	642	1,292	101·2
Cornwall	414	814	96·6
Devon	683	1,270	85·9
Dorset	605	697	15·2
Gloucestershire	378	463	22·5
Somerset	165	395	139·4
Wiltshire	519	855	64·7
South West	3,406	5,786	69·9
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	416	615	47·8
Salop	324	622	92·0
Staffordshire	725	1,341	85·0
Warwickshire	530	826	55·8
West Midlands	2,461	3,071	24·8
West Midlands	4,456	6,475	45·3
Cheshire	775	1,073	38·5
Greater Manchester	2,136	3,590	68·1
Lancashire	1,121	1,735	54·8
Merseyside	1,297	1,714	32·2
North West	5,329	8,112	52·2
Clwyd	221	388	75·6
Dyfed	270	328	21·5
Gwent	401	533	32·9
Gwynedd	338	313	−7·4
Mid Glamorgan	593	779	31·4
Powys	32	65	103·1
South Glamorgan	357	577	61·6
West Glamorgan	170	474	178·8
Wales	2,382	3,457	45·1

County Court mortgage possession orders made

	1990	1991	Percentage change
Cleveland	410	589	43·7
Cumbria	176	258	46·6
Durham	297	598	101·3
Northumberland	91	111	22·0
Tyne and Wear	575	636	10·6
North	1,549	2,192	41·5
Humberside	891	1,400	57·1
North Yorkshire	335	558	66·6
South Yorkshire	750	1,220	62·7
West Yorkshire	1,816	2,563	41·1
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,792	5,741	51·4
Derbyshire	645	845	31·0
Leicestershire	694	984	41·8
Lincolnshire	581	797	37·2
Northamptonshire	905	1,233	36·2
Nottinghamshire	1,003	1,365	36·1
East Midlands	3,828	5,224	36·5
Cambridgeshire	987	1,273	29·0
Norfolk	684	921	34·6
Suffolk	628	866	37·9
East Anglia	2,299	3,060	33·1
Bedfordshire	821	1,163	41·7
Berkshire	1,325	1,401	5·7
Buckinghamshire	1,225	1,240	1·2
Essex	2,289	2,864	25·1
Greater London	11,146	14,312	28·4
Hampshire	2,306	2,697	17·0
Hertfordshire	1,214	1,359	11·9
Isle of Wight	121	220	81·8
Kent	2,804	3,171	13·1
Oxfordshire	393	756	92·4
Surrey	782	1,111	42·1
Sussex	2,142	2,579	20·4
South East	26,568	32,873	23·7
Avon	839	1,258	49·9
Cornwall	442	681	54·1
Devon	1,341	1,707	27·3
Dorset	897	1,055	17·6
Gloucestershire	295	423	43·4
Somerset	250	452	80·8
Wiltshire	748	892	19·3
South West	4,812	6,468	34·4
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	566	994	75·6
Salop	295	488	65·4
Staffordshire	898	1,364	51·9
Warwickshire	661	759	14·8
West Midlands	2,162	3,335	54·3
West Midlands	4,582	6,940	51·5
Cheshire	497	947	90·5
Greater Manchester	2,005	2,976	48·4
Lancashire	1,168	1,940	66·1
Merseyside	1,038	1,449	39·6
North West	4,708	7,312	55·3
Clwyd	172	365	112·2
Dyfed	201	502	149·8
Gwent	521	645	23·8
Gwynedd	249	311	24·9
Mid Glamorgan	577	846	46·6

	1990	1991	Percentage change
Powys	26	76	192·3
South Glamorgan	417	681	63·3
West Glamorgan	417	532	27·6
Wales	2,580	3,958	53·4

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Attorney-General (1) if he will arrange for decisions by the Crown prosecution service as to whether or not criminal proceedings are to be brought to be communicated to any police officer under investigation as quickly as possible;

(2) in how many cases the Crown prosecution service has received files for consideration in connection with the West Yorkshire police inquiry into the West Midlands serious crime squad;

(3) when he expects the Crown prosecution service to have reached a decision in all cases submitted to it as a result of the West Yorkshire police inquiry into the West Midlands serious crime squad;

(4) in how many cases the Crown prosecution service has decided whether criminal proceedings are to be brought against any police officer under investigation arising from the West Yorkshire police inquiry into the West Midlands crime squad.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General when he received the West Yorkshire police report on the West Midlands serious crimes squad; and when he expects to reach a decision.

The Attorney-General: Between 16 March 1990 and 16 October 1991 the Crown prosecution service has received from the West Yorkshire metropolitan police a total of 73 files relating respectively to complaints about individual officers and investigations unto practices of the West Midlands serious crime squad. Consideration of these cases is well advanced, but a final decision will not be taken in any particular case until it has also been reviewed in the context of the cumulative evidence available from all the cases under consideration.

It is not at present possible to say when final decisions will be taken, but this will be as soon as possible and it is hoped in the near future. In accordance with normal practice in this type of case, the decisions will be communicated to individual officers by a senior officer and not directly by the Crown prosecution service.

Bailiffs

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General what action the Lord Chancellor proposes to take in relation to the lack of regulation over some private bailiffs who enforce judgments and orders by the seizure and sale of property.

The Attorney-General: The right of a creditor to seize and sell a debtor's property to enforce a judgment or order is an important remedy which requires a difficult balance to be struck between the interests of creditors and debtors. This is not easy to achieve, whether enforcement be by sheriffs, county court bailiffs, certificated bailiffs, or other private bailiffs. My noble and learned Friend is currently conducting a review of the organisation and management of these civil enforcement agents and he hopes to publish a consultation paper later this year. The terms of reference of the review are, to consider:

(a) whether changes should be made to the organisation and management of agents involved in the civil enforcement process;

(b) the part which the state should play in the organisation and management of enforcement agents;

(c) the ways in which any changes to the organisation and management of enforcement agents could be achieved;

(d) whether any changes to the law governing the work of enforcement agents are necessary or desirable.

My noble and learned Friend envisages a three-month consultation period during which he hopes to obtain a wide spectrum of views. Any changes the Government decide to make as a result of the review are likely to involve legislation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Young Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15-year-old boys and girls in prison received a punishment for a disciplinary offence in 1990 and in 1991; and for what offences they were punished.

Mrs. Rumbold: The age of prisoners punished for a disciplinary offence was not recorded centrally up to 1990. Such information will be available for 1991 but the data will not be complete until the second half of this year.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15-year-old prisoners have been held in police or court cells in 1991; and in which ones they have been held.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information on the total number and location of 15-year-old prisoners held in police cells is not collected centrally. When a 15-year-old prisoner is received into police cells the police inform the local liaison governor and priority arrangements are set in hand for the prisoner to be transferred immediately to a prison service establishment.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which prisons 15-year-old girls were held in 1990 and in 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: According to the records held centrally, 11 girls aged 15 were received into prison service establishments in England and Wales in 1990 and all were held only under sentence. They were initially received into Holloway prison, New Hall prison or young offender institution or Risley prison or remand centre. One girl was recorded as having been held subsequently in Askham Grange prison but information about all such transfers was not retained centrally. Data for 1991 are not yet complete.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15-year-old girls were received into prison in each year of the past decade; for what offences they were convicted, and how long were the prison sentences.

Mr. Rumbold: The number of 15-year-old females received under sentence is published annually in "Prison Statistics England and Wales"—table 3.10 of the volume for 1989, Cm. 1221—copies of which are in the Library.

The information requested for the years 1981-90 is given in the tables. Data for 1991 are not yet available.

Females aged 15 received under sentence: by offence, 1981-1990

Persons

Offence	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Violence against the person	6	2	11	7	8	8	9	7	3	—
Sexual offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	4	9	10	11	7	3	5	2	—	1
Robbery	2	2	2	4	4	3	2	4	3	4
Theft and handling	6	3	4	10	7	4	4	10	4	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	1	1	2	—	—	—	—	—
Drugs offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other	—	—	3	4	4	—	3	3	5	2
Not recorded	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
All Offences	18	16	31	37	32	18	23	26	15	11

Females aged 15 received under sentence: by length of sentence, 1981-1990

Persons

Length of sentence	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Up to 3 months	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Over 3 months up to 6 months	—	—	19	35	24	15	17	19	10	5
Over 6 months up to 12 months	—	—	6	2	5	1	6	4	2	3
Over 12 months up to 3 years	1	—	—	—	3	2	—	1	3	1
Over 3 years	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	2
Borstal training	17	16	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
All sentences	18	16	31	37	32	18	23	26	15	11

Women Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women prisoners were held in police or court cells during 1991; where they were held; and for how long.

Mrs. Rumbold: The average number of women prisoners held in police cells throughout 1991 was two. At various points during the year women prisoners were held in police cells by the Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, Metropolitan, Staffordshire, Surry and West Midlands police forces. It is not possible from the information available to say how long individual prisoners were held.

Police Cells

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who is responsible for ensuring that the correct medication as prescribed by the doctor is given to a night prisoner held in a police cell.

Mrs. Rumbold: Paragraph 9·5 of code of practice C issued under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 provides that where a detained person is required to take or apply any medication in compliance with medical directions, the custody officer is responsible for its safekeeping and for ensuring that he is given the opportunity to take or apply it at the appropriate time.

Road Deaths

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of deaths of drivers and pedestrians caused by cars taken without the owner's consent in each year since 1980.

Mr. John Patten: The information is not available centrally.

National Lottery

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to obtain the views of interested parties on the subject of a national lottery since 17 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are considering carefully how best to consult interested parties about the issues raised by a national lottery; an annoucement will be made as soon as possible.

Refugees

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many refugees were accepted from Yugoslavia in each of the years 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is given in the table. At end-January 1992, around 430 asylum applications by Yugoslav nationals, mainly made in the last three months of 1991, were still under consideration.

Grants[1] of asylum in the United Kingdom to Yugoslav nationals

	Grants of asylum
1989	—
1990	1
[2,3]1991	1

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[1] Excluding dependants.

[2] Information for 1991 may understate because of delays in recording: information for October to December is not yet available.

[3] January to September.

Heroin

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that prospective importers of heroin—diamorphine—keep standards of transport security and site security equal to those maintained by the current United Kingdom supplier.

Mr. John Patten: No decision has yet been taken to license the commercial importation of diamorphine. A precondition for the grant of any licence to deal in diamorphine is that the drugs inspectorate is satisfied on the arrangements proposed by the prospective licensee for transport and site security.

Marriages of Convenience

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in each of the last 10 years his Department has been notified by the registrar general that a proposed marriage is purely one of convenience.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Statistics of such notifications are not maintained.

Begging

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* prosecuted for begging, *(b)* convicted of begging, *(c)* prosecuted for sleeping rough and *(d)* convicted of sleeping rough in the Metropolitan police district in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. John Patten: Information for 1989 and 1990, which is provisional, is given in the table. 1991 data are not yet available.

Number of persons prosecuted and convicted for offences of begging and sleeping out under the Vagrancy Act 1824 in the metropolitan police district 1989 and 1990[1]

	Begging		*Sleeping out*	
	Prosecutions	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Metropolitan police district				
1989	1,251	1,188	12	10
[1]1990	1,445	1,308	12	11
City of London				
1989	5	5	—	—
[1]1990	3	3	1	1

[1] Provisional.

DNA Samples

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will discuss with chief constables the need for DNA samples to be taken from all those convicted of violent crimes; if he will maintain a national register of such DNA information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are practical, legal and ethical issues in the collection of samples for DNA profiling and in the development of a national DNA database. My right hon. Friend has asked the Royal Commission on criminal justice to consider this subject and we await its recommendations.

Vagrancy

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made under the Vagrancy Act 1824 in Wales in each of the last five years.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the number of people who are arrested is not collected centrally. The data given in the table relate to the number of persons prosecuted and convicted for offences under the Vagrancy Act 1824 in Wales from 1986 to 1990, information for which is provisional.

Number of persons prosecuted and convicted of offences under the Vagrancy Act 1824 in Wales—1986 to 1990[1]

Year	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
1986	114	82
1987	96	72
1988	127	88
1989	88	65
1990[1]	111	77

[1] Provisional.

Local Government, Hampshire

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will give consideration to deferring his determination of the proposed new parliamentary constituencies for Hampshire until such time as the Local Government Commission has brought forward its recommendations for the future structure of local government in Hampshire.

Mrs. Rumbold: No. A general review of all parliamentary constituencies in England is currently being undertaken by the Boundary Commission, which is under a statutory duty to make a report to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary within the time scale laid down in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. As part of that review process, the commission publishes provisional recommendations—in the case of parliamentary constituencies in Hampshire, these were published on 6 February—and then considers any resulting representations, together with the outcome of any local inquiry which it may hold, when making its final report. My right hon. Friend will consider that report when it is submitted.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in March 1990, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During my visit to Hong Kong I had a number of official engagements and meetings. I also had a private engagement with representatives from Conservatives Abroad.

Hillsborough Family Support Group

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he received the letter from the Hillsborough Family Support Group sent to him on 22 October 1991; and when he expects to reply.

Mr. John Patten: The letter from the Hillsborough Family Support Group was received in my office on 23 October 1991. A reply has now been sent by my officials. I apologise to the group for the delay in replying.

Credit Reference Agencies

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent investigations he has undertaken into the current operation of credit reference agencies; and what information came out of those investigations.

Mrs. Rumbold: The operation of credit reference agencies is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading and the Data Protection Registrar. I understand that they keep this matter under review.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the operation of credit reference agencies; and what response he has made.

Mrs. Rumbold: I have received 15 written representations on the operation of credit reference agencies since the beginning of 1991. Enforcement of the law bearing on the operation of credit reference agencies is a matter for the Data Protection Registrar, the data protection tribunal and the Director General of Fair Trading.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in north Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

Mr. Kenneth Baker *[holding answer 11 February 1992]*: The readily available information is as follows. The Home Office pays specific grant on a proportion of the county council's expenditure on the police, magistrates courts and probation services and on civil defence. The proportion varies according to the service. My Department also pays grant under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 to enable the county council to employ additional staff to meet the special needs of local communities of Commonwealth origins. Information on the payment of these grants, and on Home Office expenditure on Her Majesty's prison service establishments in north Yorkshire, and on the emergency planning college at Easingwold, is as follows.

Specific grant paid in respect of expenditure in financial year

£000s

	1979-80	*1991-92*[1]
Police[2]	8,322	28,869
Magistrates courts[3]	[6]	2,478
Probation[3]	[6]	2,185
Civil Defence[4]	[6]	368
Section 11[5]	0	16

[1] Estimated.

[2] Rate of Grant: 50 per cent. in 1979-80, 51 per cent. in 1991-92

[3] Rate of Grant: 80 per cent.

[4] Rate of Grant: mainly 100 per cent.

[5] Rate of Grant: 75 per cent.

[6] Not available.

Net operating costs of the two prison service establishments in north Yorkshire in 1990-91: £6·169 million.

Estimated expenditure on emergency planning college in 1991-92: £2·758 million.

Illegal Drugs (Import)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new measures he plans to introduce to combat the importation of illegal drugs into the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is the Department with the primary responsibility for combating the importation of illegal drugs into the United Kingdom. The Department is engaged in a number of initiatives both at home and on the international scene.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise chairs the mutual assistance group 1992 on customs co-operation within the European Community which is working towards greater co-operation and the strengthening of the external border of the Community. An important feature is the sharing of intelligence and arrangements are in hand to implement a computerised intelligence system—to be known as the customs information system—early in 1992. A new protocol to the Naples convention is also under discussion with the aim of improving co-operation between customs administrations in criminal matters covering such areas as cross border surveillance and controlled deliveries.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is also participating in plans for the new European drugs unit, which will help to co-ordinate the intelligence resources of law enforcement agencies across the European Community. The Department, with its wide experience in anti-smuggling work, will be fully represented in the new agency alongside the police.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, in conjunction with the Customs Co-operation Council, is taking a leading role in an international initiative to promote co-operation between customs authorities and international carriers. A major objective is to secure advance information about suspect persons or consignments, so as to enable customs to target its anti-drugs operations more effectively. Through the ratification of the 1988 Vienna convention on drugs, Customs and Excise is also engaged in developing international working arrangements under the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990 for the boarding of vessels in international waters and under the same legislation has also implemented, in July 1991, the arrangements for the seizure of cash suspected of being the proceeds from, or for use in, drug smuggling.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is also about to increase its capability in aerial surveillance and is co-operating in extended international surveillance exercises. It is extending its network of drugs liaison officers overseas and is actively pursuing its training programme for overseas customs and drugs law enforcement officials. The programme is targeted primarily at drug source and drug transit countries.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is also alive to the dangers of the illicit trade in the precursor chemicals used to manufacture drugs. The United Kingdom has been to the fore in encouraging the development of effective measures to counter this trade and we are currently working with our EC partners on a revised regulation to ensure consistent and effective action across the Community.

On the domestic front Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is extending its use of memoranda of understanding with trade organisations in order to improve the flow of drugs information and to assist organisations to develop security arrangements. The Department is also entering into a new training programme in 1992 to assist flexible anti-smuggling teams—FASTs—to make use of advance intelligence and advance targeting of drugs suspects. The implementation of the review of anti-smuggling controls continues with the setting up of FASTs and co-operation between regional collections and their opposites in Europe through joint memoranda is being developed. In addition, research and development for enhanced scientific and technical aids continues to take place. On 30 January 1992, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the allocation of assets seized from international drugs traffickers to anti-drugs work in the United Kingdom. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise received over £600,000, which will be used at operational level to assist in the fight against drug trafficking.

ENERGY

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1988, the Minister of State took part in party-political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Member for Chester (Sir. P. Morrison) met fellow Conservatives in the margins of official duties on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1988.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in June 1988, he took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) did not take part in any political activities on his visit to Hong Kong in June 1988.

Major Energy Users Council

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the Major Energy Users Council relating to electricity prices; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I met representatives of the Major Energy Users Council—MEUC—on 12 February to discuss electricity prices for large consumers, and listened carefully and sympathetically to their concerns. My right hon. Friend asked the MEUC to provide detailed information about past and present electricity prices for MEUC members, on an individual site or company basis, as well as about other options to reduce energy costs which companies may have investigated, such as on-site generation or energy efficiency measures. It agreed to do so. Although my right hon. Friend and I fully appreciate the concerns of the MEUC about the levels of its electricity prices, it was made clear to it that the Government would not provide public subsidies. The Government remain fully confident that they have set in place adequate safeguards to protect the interests of all consumers in the electricity market.

Coal Imports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give by year for each year from 1979 the value of coal imported *(a)* in cash and *(b)* in real terms into the United Kingdom showing in his answer (i) the port the coal was unloaded at and (ii) the country of origin of the coal.

Mr. Wakeham: *[holding answer 4 February 1992]:* The figures for coal imports, including the costs of insurance and freight, are shown in the tables:

Table 1: Coal imports by port of entry, 1979 to 1991
Value of imports

£ million

Port of entry	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Immingham	3	4	0	1	0	13	32	47	22	31	47	85	112
London (including Tilbury)	16	37	15	18	34	12	72	20	22	31	34	80	101
Port Talbot	20	20	36	49	36	91	90	63	69	65	87	112	93
Middlesbrough	28	36	41	29	27	63	113	103	86	79	96	104	95
Medway	7	24	10	11	12	6	32	29	23	24	29	41	79
Greenock	0	12	19	22	36	46	85	47	41	35	38	37	39
Liverpool	12	30	16	—	1	2	17	6	6	1	13	36	35
Belfast	1	3	6	7	9	32	37	13	10	12	14	21	23
Cardiff	4	12	0	—	0	0	5	11	9	13	9	17	20
Swansea	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	0	0	4	7	6	16
Hull	—	—	—	—	0	0	1	1	1	—	2	4	14
Trent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34	17	15	14	12	11
Other ports	46	36	16	46	60	228	195	69	63	107	78	52	66
Total	138	215	158	182	215	493	678	443	368	418	469	605	703

Table 2: Coal imports by country of origin, 1979 to 1991
Value of imports

£ million

Country	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
U.S.A[1]	35	106	72	81	48	160	166	139	105	148	183	255	290
Australia[1]	60	77	57	45	85	84	253	149	115	106	89	152	171
Colombia[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	12	21	34	44	71
South Africa	1	3	4	3	3	16	39	12	7	12	14	14	26
Canada	0	0	—	0	—	6	19	16	12	16	26	38	26

Country	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Poland	19	13	5	13	20	69	76	50	41	42	38	41	26
Soviet Union	3	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	10	6	17	26
Germany[2]	12	6	11	29	44	90	74	44	26	18	24	24	21
China	2	2	—	1	1	2	4	2	11	16	23	3	13
Other countries[1]	6	6	8	10	13	65	41	26	37	28	33	16	32
Total	138	215	158	182	215	493	678	443	368	418	470	605	703

Table 3: Coal imports in real terms[3] by port of entry, 1979 to 1991
Value of imports

£ million (base year 1990)

Port of entry	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Immingham	7	7	0	1	1	18	42	60	27	36	50	85	105
London (including Tilbury)	34	68	24	28	49	16	95	25	27	36	37	80	94
Port Talbot	44	37	59	75	52	127	119	80	84	74	93	112	87
Middlesbrough	62	65	67	44	39	87	149	132	105	90	103	104	89
Medway	16	44	17	17	18	8	42	37	28	28	31	41	74
Greenock	0	23	32	34	52	64	111	59	50	40	40	37	37
Liverpool	26	56	26	—	2	3	22	8	7	1	14	36	32
Belfast	3	5	10	11	14	45	48	17	12	13	15	21	21
Cardiff	9	23	0	—	0	0	6	14	11	15	10	17	19
Swansea	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	0	0	5	8	6	15
Hull	—	—	—	—	0	0	1	1	1	—	2	4	13
Trent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43	21	17	15	12	10
Other ports	101	66	26	71	87	319	258	88	76	122	83	52	62
Total	303	395	261	280	313	688	894	564	447	476	501	605	658

Table 4: Coal imports in real terms[3] by country of origin, 1979 to 1991
Value of imports

£ million (base year 1990)

Country	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
United States of America[1]	78	195	120	125	69	223	219	177	128	168	195	255	271
Australia[1]	132	141	94	69	123	118	333	190	140	121	94	152	160
Colombia[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	15	24	37	44	67
South Africa	3	5	6	5	5	22	52	15	8	13	15	14	25
Canada	0	0	—	0	—	8	25	21	14	18	27	38	24
Poland	43	24	9	20	29	96	101	64	50	48	41	41	24
Soviet Union	6	4	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	11	7	17	24
Germany[2]	27	11	18	44	64	125	97	57	31	20	25	24	20
China	3	3	—	1	1	3	5	3	13	19	24	3	12
Other countries[1]	11	11	12	15	19	90	55	33	45	32	35	16	29
Total	303	395	261	280	313	688	894	564	447	476	501	605	658

[1] Some imports previously recorded by Customs and Excise as originating in the Netherlands have been re-allocated to the other countries indicated or, where revised country of origin data is not available, included in the residual entry, "Others". This re-allocation has been carried out for 1991 and estimates of such imports previously classified to the Netherlands have been included for 1990. Figures for earlier years have not been re-allocated to individual countries.

[2] Includes imports previously recorded separately for the German Democratic Republic.

[3] Real terms is defined as cash figures adjusted to 1990 price levels by excluding the effect of general inflation as measured by the Gross Domestic Product deflator. An estimated value for the Gross Domestic Product deflator has been used for 1991.

Due to rounding the sum of the constituent items may not equal the totals.

— = Less than £0·5 million.

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

THE ARTS

British Library

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Minister for the Arts when the shelving at the British Library development at St. Pancras will be in usable condition; and when he expects the official opening to take place.

Mr. Renton: Problems have been experienced with the mechanical movement and paint treatment of the basement bookshelving. A solution to the mechanical problem has been factory tested and the British Library is carrying out its own tests in the basements at St. Pancras. Tests on the paint, however, have shown there may be inadequate paint protection in places. A number of options are under discussion with the contractor concerned. Until the outcome of these discussions is known it is not possible to say when the library can start to move its collections into the new building. The bookshelves are a small, albeit important, part of the overall project. The rest of the project is essentially unaffected by the bookshelving and is still progressing within the cash budget set for it in 1988. An announcement about the official opening will be made as soon as uncertainties have been resolved.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1990, the then Minister took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Renton: The visit to Hong Kong in October 1990 of my predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the present Chief Secretary to the Treasury, involved official duties only.

European Arts Festival

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Minister for the Arts what funding he proposes to make available for the European arts festival to mark the United Kingdom's presidency of the European Community in the second half of 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We will be making £6 million available for the European arts festival over the two financial years 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Parliamentary approval for this new service in the current financial year will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Office of Arts and Libraries vote—class XII, vote 2. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £100,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Child Poverty

13. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of the Child Poverty Action Group to discuss the effects of the Government's economic policy on child poverty.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. Friend last met representatives of the CPAG in June 1990.

Denationalisation

19. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the increase in share ownership in Yorkshire as a result of denationalisation.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The number of adults owning shares in the Yorkshire and Humberside region has increased by over 50 per cent. since 1987. The privatisations of nationalised industries have played a significant role in introducing the benefits of share ownership to an increasing proportion of the public.

Growth Rates

20. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the annual growth rate between 1988 and 1992 in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* France, *(c)* Italy and *(d)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maples: On the basis of the figures in the December 1991 edition of the OECD's economic outlook for Germany, France and Italy and of the autumn statement for the United Kingdom: *(a)* 3·3 per cent.; *(b)* 2·5 per cent.; *(c)* 2 per cent; *(d)* 0·8 per cent.

Planning Total

21. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the planning total in 1990-91 prices *(a)* in 1987-88 and *(b)* 1988-89; and what it is for the current year.

Mr. Mellor: The outturn for the planning total, in 1990-91 prices, was £176·6 billion and £168·2 billion in 1987-88 and 1988-89, respectively. Outturn in 1991-92 is forecast to be £191·6 billion, in 1990-91 prices.

Gross Domestic Product

22. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of non-oil gross domestic product was represented by non-oil taxes and national insurance contributions in *(a)* 1978-79 and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Mellor: 35 and 37 per cent. respectively.

Citizens Charter

23. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the purpose of the citizens charter and how it will affect the working of government.

Mr. Maude: The citizens charter is the most comprehensive programme ever for raising standards in the public sector. It will not affect Ministers' responsibilities for setting standards and allocating resources, but it will have a profound effect on the way Government services are delivered: increasing choice, quality, value and accountability to the customer. The charter mark scheme will recognise and reward those who achieve excellence in meeting the charter standard.

The citizens charter will maintain pressure on organisations to improve quality of service; increase efficiency and offer greater value for money to the taxpayer. It will remain at the very heart of the Government's programme over the next 10 years.

Investment

24. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of business investment manufacturing investment represented *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* the third quarter of 1991.

Mr. Maples: Manufacturing investment at constant market prices represented 30 per cent. of total business investment in 1979 and 21 per cent. in the third quarter of 1991.

National Insurance

25. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions.

Mr. Mellor: Only one recent representation about the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions has been received. The TUC wrote advocating the abolition of the upper earnings limit on employees contributions.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give an estimate of the public sector borrowing requirement for the end of the current financial year.

Mr. Mellor: The 1991 autumn statement forecast a PSBR in 1991-92 of £10½ billion. The next forecast will be given in the Budget.

Car Taxation

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the motor industry about the taxing of cars.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from a wide crosssection of the motor industry. Both I and my right hon. Friend have also met a number of delegations from the industry.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total tax take in the last year for which figures are available of special car tax and VAT levied on the sale of a new car.

Mr. Maples: In 1990-91 car tax raised £1·5 billion, and an estimated £2·7 billion was raised from VAT levied on new cars.

Money Supply

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average annual increase in the real money supply *(a)* from 1970 to 1973, *(b)* from 1973 to 1979 and *(c)* since 1979.

Mr. Maples: The information is as follows:

Money supply average annual increase in real terms[1]
Percentage growth

	M0	M4
1 January 1970 to 31 December 1973	−0·1	8·4
1 January 1974 to 31 December 1979	−2·7	−2·6
1 January 1980 to 31 December 1991	−1·9	7·0

[1] Based on the retail prices index as the deflator.

Overseas Investment

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current amount of Britain's overseas investment; and what was the comparable figure 10 years ago

Mr. Maples: The estimated level of overseas direct and portfolio investment by United Kingdom residents at the end of 1990 was £312 billion, compared with £52 billion at the end of 1980. Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

Privatisation

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table to show the publicly owned assets which are still to be privatised, the Government's estimated value of each of these assets and the total value and the liability of each such asset and how much public money would be required to write off such liabilities before sale to the private sector.

Mr. Maude: The major privatisation candidates are British Technology Group, Northern Ireland Electricity, British Coal and British Rail. The proceeds likely to be obtained depend on market conditions at the time of sale and decisions yet to be taken. The cost to the Exchequer of recapitalisation prior to sale for any privatisation candidate will depend on future decisions and will be announced in due course in the usual way.

Engineering Products

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing for each year since 1970 the relative profitability of exports of engineering products on a similar basis to column 6 of the table F3 of the "Money Review of External Trade Statistics."

Mr. Maples: No. The measure of profitability to which the hon. Member refers requires compatible indices of export unit values and producers' output prices, which are available for manufacturing as a whole but not for its components.

Ambassadorial Limousines

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will outline Treasury policy in connection with the remittance of moneys received on the sale by one of Her Majesty's embassies of an ambassadorial limousine;

(2) if he will consider allowing Her Majesty's embassies to retain the proceeds of Rolls-Royce motor cars sold out of service in order to facilitate the purchase of a new one.

Mr. Mellor: Receipts from the sale of official vehicles are retained by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. They are appropriated in aid of the vote—class II, vote 1. —along with other similar receipts. Any receipts above the level shown in the estimate have to be surrendered as Consolidated Fund extra receipts.

EC Finance

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sums were paid to the EC by each of the member states for each of the last six financial years; what is the projection for the current financial year; and what sums were received by each state from the EC for the same years.

Mr. Maude: Total contributions to the EC budget by each member state for the years 1986-1990, together with an estimate of contributions for 1991 and 1992 are in the table. Outturn information on member states' contributions in 1991 will be given in the 1991 Court of Auditors' report due for publication in December 1992.

mecu

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Belgium	1,448	1,703	1,835	1,806	1,764	2,207	2,513
Denmark	791	845	956	871	775	1,012	1,153
Germany	8,730	9,385	11,535	11,110	10,358	15,402	17,580
Greece	632	340	430	566	564	790	878
Spain	2,321	1,709	3,119	3,135	3,671	4,314	5,381
France	6,885	7,330	9,096	8,623	8,090	10,819	11,903
Ireland	344	338	328	371	368	494	493
Italy	4,718	5,192	6,626	6,406	6,098	8,431	9,297
Luxembourg	66	74	82	73	74	102	116
Netherlands	2,232	2,366	2,796	2,701	2,615	3,289	3,619
Portugal	279	342	400	458	502	717	851
United Kingdom	4,825	5,728	5,324	6,568	6,534	5,077	7,658

Source: 1986-1990; Court of Auditors Report, 1991; Supplementary and Amending Budget No. 3, 1992; Adopted Budget.

Complete information on receipts by each member state from the EC budget is not available. However partial information, published in the Court of Auditors' report, is given in the table for the years 1986 to 1990. Estimates for 1991 and 1992 are not available.

mecu

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Belgium	1,164	985	838	683	990
Denmark	1,212	1,144	1,286	1,045	1,198
Germany	4,988	4,542	5,428	4,580	4,807
Greece	1,905	1,877	1,922	2,597	3,034
Spain	2,416	1,985	4,012	4,951	5,383
France	6,324	6,744	7,315	5,676	6,285
Ireland	1,574	1,438	1,488	1,712	2,261
Italy	4,523	5,256	5,551	6,177	5,681
Luxembourg	6	12	14	8	14
Netherlands	2,450	2,890	3,946	3,830	2,984
Portugal	498	731	915	1,114	1,103
United Kingdom	3,387	3,122	3,254	3,214	3,147

Source: Court of Auditors' Report.

Charities

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated annual cost of exempting all registered charities from liability for value added tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information about the amount of value added tax borne by charities is not collated centrally but it is estimated that charities pay between £180 million and £250 million in value added tax each year.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of *(a)* the additional revenue accruing in 1991-92 and in 1992-93 respectively, from the increase in value added tax to 17½ per cent. and *(b)* the total additional expenditure incurred in each year from the change in the rate of value added tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: *(a)* The increase in VAT from 15 to 17½ per cent. will produce an estimated additional £3,900 million in receipts in 1991-92 and £5,515 million in 1992-93.

(b) The VAT rate was increased in the 1991 Budget as part of a switch from local to central Government taxation. The overall effect on purchasing power and consumer demand of this switch is broadly neutral so we do not expect the level of total expenditure to have changed significantly.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cash amount paid in value added tax by a family with two children on average earnings in 1979; and what is his latest estimate for the amount now.

Mr. Norman Lamont: A married couple with two children on average male earnings is estimated to have paid £6·55 a week in VAT in 1978-79 at 1991-92 prices. It is estimated that a similar family will pay £17·65 a week in 1991-92.

CBI Manufacturing Council

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has yet received any representations from the newly established manufacturing council of the CBI; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I have not received any representations from the manufacturing council of the CBI.

Inflation

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average inflation rate (i) from 1974 to 1979 and (ii) since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: Between December 1973 and December 1979 the average annual rate of inflation, as measured by the retail prices index, was 16 per cent. per annum. This compares with 6·9 per cent. for the period December 1979 to December 1991.

Output

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the output figures used in CSO press notice CSO(92)14 for November using current instead of 1985 weights.

Mr. Mellor: Information, using weights later than 1985, is not available and could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Trade Figures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the sets of trade figures for 1991 and for the latest quarter as a percentage of 1985, in the form used in CSO press notice CSO(92)15, using 1991 weighting.

Mr. Mellor: No. The press notice referred to by the hon. Member gives trade volume and unit value indices using 1985 weights and, following well-established procedures, will be rebased on 1990 in the course of 1993.

Customs Office, Dartmouth

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the proposed closure of the customs office in Dartmouth, south Devon; and what steps are being taken in response to the increase in drug trafficking in the south-west.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The completion of the single market on 1 January 1993 will mean that fiscal and customs formalities at internal EC frontiers will be removed permitting the freest movement of legitimate traffic and passengers. However anti-smuggling checks will remain and these will be focused on major dangers to society such as drugs, instruments of terrorism and child pornography.

The effects of the single market on staffing in the Customs and Excise department are particularly significant in ports and airports that deal predominantly with traffic arriving from other EC countries, which is the case in Dartmouth. Consequently the department has had to examine carefully both the numbers and location of staff in such areas.

In determining future customs anti-smuggling resources, the aim has been to provide a service which is better equipped and targeted at areas of highest risk. A further consideration is the more flexible approach being adopted in the way the controls are organised; this moves away from the static controls previously used.

This approach has been adopted nationally as a result of the review of anti-smuggling controls completed by the department in 1989. The changes in no way reduce the effectiveness of controls against drug trafficking. Customs is also taking steps to ensure provision of more timely and adequate intelligence.

A flexible anti-smuggling team is based in Plymouth which covers the south Devon area and additionally it is proposed to retain a Customs presence at both Brixham and Salcombe.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in November 1990, the Economic Secretary took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Maples: No.

Income Tax

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue effect in *(a)* 1992-93 and *(b)* a full year if (i) all personal tax allowances except the single person's allowance, (ii) employee contributions to occupational pensions, (iii) contributions to personal pensions, (iv) reliefs other than those listed at (i) to (iii) above, (v) a combination of (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv), (vi) a combination of (i), (ii) and (iii), (vii) a combination of (ii) and (iii), (viii) a combination of (ii), (iii) and (iv), (ix) a combination of (ii) and (iv) and (x) a combination of (iii) and (iv), were restricted to the basic rate, giving the numbers affected in each case, distinguishing between (1) basic rate taxpayers and (2) higher rate taxpayers and giving the number who are brought into higher rate tax in each case for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: Estimates of the increase in liability to income tax in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income are given in the following table:

Yield following restriction of specified allowances and reliefs to the basic rate

		£ million
(i)	All allowances except the personal allowance	300
(ii)	Occupational pension contributions	250
(iii)	Personal pension contributions	150
(iv)	All reliefs other than pension contributions	150
(v)	A combination of (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv)	900
(vi)	A combination of (i), (ii) and (iii)	750
(vii)	A combination of (ii) and (iii)	400
(viii)	A combination of (ii), (iii) and (iv)	550
(ix)	A combination of (ii) and (iv)	400
(x)	A combination of (iii) and (iv)	300

About 1·8 million taxpayers would be affected by the restriction of all allowances, except the personal allowance, and reliefs to the basic rate of whom 1·5 million are currently liable at the higher rate and 0·3 million at the basic [illegible].

The estimates of revenue yield do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from such restrictions.

I regret that it is not possible to provide estimates for 1992-93.

EC Economic Convergence

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he proposes to measure convergence between the economies of European Community member states.

Mr. Maude: The Maastricht treaty emphasises four criteria for assessing economic convergence. These criteria concern the levels of inflation and interest rates; membership of the narrow band of the ERM; and avoidance of excessive budget deficits.

ECOFIN

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outocme of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Maples: The Economic and Finance Council of the European Community met in Brussels on 10 February. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council discussed the Irish Government's programme for economic convergence, and welcomed their achievements to date in reducing inflation and putting their public finances on a sound basis. The Council encouraged Ireland to continue with its policies to reduce its very high level of unemployment through tax reform, improved flexibility, adaptation of industrial policy and wage moderation. The Irish commitment to reduce its public debt to 89 per cent. of GDP in 1993 was also noted as a sign of its Government's determination to continue budgetary consolidation. The Council invited the Commission and the monetary committee to monitor the implementation of the programme and to report back to the Council before the end of 1992.

The Council also carried out its biannual examination of the Community's economic situation, noting the current low growth and high unemployment in the Community and focusing on the need for greater convergence especially in the areas of inflation, labour market flexibility and savings. The Council noted that structural rigidities, especially labour market inflexibility, were major obstacles to price stability, catching up and lower unemployment. It was also agreed that an adequate level of savings is required to maintain investment and economic growth, to support capital accumulation in poorer regions and to allow the Community to meet its external commitments. The Council invited the Commission, the committee of governors and the monetary and economic policy committees to examine these issues further in time for the next multilateral surveillance exercise.

The annual economic report for 1991-92 was adopted without discussion.

The Commission confirmed to the Council that the problems which had delayed the disbursement of a 500 mecu food credit for Russia appeared to have been solved. It was agreed that the first tranche of the separately agreed 1·25 becu loan should also be made available to those other states of the former Soviet Union who had signed a memorandum of understanding with official creditors about the debts of the former Soviet Union. It was also agreed that EC members would work to ensure that the states of the former Soviet Union can become members of the IMF as soon as possible.

The Council accepted the presidency proposals to resolve the outstanding issues in respect of the adoption of the 1992 Community budget. A revision to the financial perspective was agreed which would meet the Council's particular concerns over research and make available up to 450 mecu for technical assistance to the former Soviet Union.

Agreement was also reached on the outstanding detailed issues surrounding the draft directive on the arrangements for the holding, movement and control of goods subject to excise duty, which had been agreed in principle by the Council on 16 December. The directive can now be formally adopted at a future Council meeting without further discussion. The Council also emphasised the importance of adopting the directives on excise duty structures and rates which are currently under discussion and set targets for doing so at the end of April and the end of June respectively.

The presidency outlined an ambitious programme for making progress in the single market and the Commission drew attention to the need to make progress in agreeing directives in the field of company taxation.

Profit Margins

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the reduction in profit margins in manufacturing industry since the end of 1989 as a percentage of sales and the effect that that has had on *(a)* the rate of inflation, *(b)* the export price of manufactured goods and *(c)* the value and volume of imports and exports of manufactured goods.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 12 February 1992]:* The rate of inflation, trade prices and trade volumes depend on a wide range of interrelated factors and it is not possible to isolate the effects of changes in profit margins.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect to date of membership of the exchange rate mechanism on the profitability of United Kingdom manufacturing industry; what is his forecast for 1992; and what effect membership has had and is expected to have on output and employment in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 12 February 1992]:* Profitability, output and employment depend on a range of factors. ERM membership has reinforced anti-inflationary policy and brought greater exchange rate stability, thereby enabling businesses across the United Kingdom to plan and invest with greater certainty. Since joining the ERM, we have been able to reduce interest rates on eight occasions by a total of 4½ percentage points.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Personal Information

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to allow a consumer to consent to, or be aware of, those uses and disclosures of personal information not obvious at the time the consumer provides the information; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: Existing legislation provides for individuals in certain circumstances to be aware that information which they disclose about themselves may be used for marketing and other purposes and give them the opportunity to object. I have no plans to introduce any further controls in this area.

RECHAR Grants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what applications have been made for RECHAR grants in relation to Nottingham; what payments have been made; and when he expects the European Commission to make the outstanding payments.

Mr. Leigh: The United Kingdom made applications for 11 coalfield areas, including Nottingham, in July 1990. The European Commission has yet to approve them, and no RECHAR money has so far been released to the United Kingdom. We hope that the Commission will approve these applications very soon.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to allow local authorities to negotiate and conclude agreements for RECHAR grants without any involvement of central Government; and what information he has on current practice in this regard in each of the other EC countries.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 February 1992]*: No. I understand that such is not the practice in any member state.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the expenditure and achievements of his Department in north Yorkshire during 1991; and what was the comparable position between June 1979 and May 1980.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 11 February 1992]*: The table lists grants offered to firms in north Yorkshire under the regional selective assistance, regional enterprise grants and the small firms merit award for research and technology schemes, together with the number of cases where terms of reference were agreed under the enterprise initiative subsidised consultancy scheme. Figures for regional development grants in 1979 are not available.

	June 1979 to May 1980 (£)	*January to December 1991 (£)*
Regional selective assistance[1]	927,716	4,920
Regional enterprise grants[2]	—	41,375
Small firms merit award for research and technology[3]	—	330,000
Enterprise initiative consultancies[4] (number)	—	107

[1] Following the review of the AA map in November 1984 only Whitby remained eligible for regional aid in north Yorkshire.

[2] Scheme started April 1988.

[3] Scheme started June 1988.

[4] Scheme started January 1989.

HEALTH

Drugs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what ACE inhibitor drugs are licensed for use in the United Kingdom; what guidance has been issued to family health service authorities and general practitioners on the use of such drugs; and what was the expenditure per head in each NHS region on such drugs during the period April to October 1991 in the PACT data system.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is given in the tables.

1. ACE inhibitor drugs licensed for use in the United Kingdom:

Drug Name
Capoten
Capozide
Innovace
Staril
Carace
Coversyl
Accupro
Tritace
Vascace
Zestril

2. Net ingredient cost (£) per head for ACE inhibitors April 1991 to September 1991 inclusive.

Regional Health Authority	*Net Ingredient Cost per head (£)*
Northern RHA	0·82
Yorkshire RHA	0·85
Trent RHA	0·81
East Anglia RHA	0·73
North West Thames RHA	0·75
North East Thames RHA	0·78
South East Thames RHA	0·84
South West Thames RHA	0·85
Wessex RHA	1·03
Oxford RHA	0·83
South Western RHA	0·99
West Midlands RHA	0·85
Mersey RHA	1·00
North Western RHA	0·91
England	0·86

Note: The expenditure data used are the net ingredient cost of ACE Inhibitors for the period April to September 1991 inclusive and have been obtained from the Prescription Pricing Authority. The data are actual and take account of all prescriptions dispensed including dispensing doctors. The population figures used are based on the OPCS estimate of resident population for mid-year 1990.

3. Although no specific guidance has been issued to FHSAs and GPs on the use of ACE inhibitors, guidance is contained in the British National Formulary which is distributed by the Department, free of charge, to all prescribing doctors and in the data sheets supplied by the companies which market these drugs.

Home Care Agencies

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to arrange for the registrations of all private and voluntary home care agencies; and how many representations he received advocating this move during 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 24 January at column *396*. During 1991 representations were received from a small number of organisations.

Respite Care (Children)

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to amend the Children Act 1989 to prohibit local authorities charging parents for the provision of respite care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. The Children Act continues the longstanding provision for a contribution to the maintenance of a child looked after by the local authority. It makes no distinction between the provision of short term pre-planned placements—respite care—and longer-term provision of accommodation. Both fall within the range of services for which local authorities have discretion as to charging. In exercising that discretion, local authorities are required to have regard to the means of the child concerned, where the service is provided to a child aged 16 or over, or his parents, where the child is under sixteen. Local authorities cannot charge for services where the child—or his/her parents depending on the child's age—is on income support. Where there is disagreement as to what is a "reasonable" charge there are provisions within the Children Act enabling the matter to be referred to the courts for resolution.

Leighton Hospital, Crewe and Mid-Cheshire Hospital Trust

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the changes in senior nursing staff which are taking place at Leighton hospital, Crewe;

(2) what information he has received from the Mid-Cheshire hospital trust of the re-grading of senior nurses, the numbers involved and the specialties which will no longer have the same ratio of trained staff of G grade level and above available for patient care.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Richard F. Lawrence, the chairman of the Mid-Cheshire hospital trust, for details.

HIV

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that dental care is readily available to people who are HIV positive.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Dental care of HIV positive patients as with any other patient is provided by general dental practitioners. Any individual who has difficulty in obtaining dental treatment is advised to contact his family health services authority.

GP Practices

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners practices there are in the Thurrock parliamentary constituency with *(a)* more than 9,000 patients, *(b)* between 7,000 and 9,000 patients, *(c)* between 5,000 and 7,000 patients, *(d)* between 3,000 and 5,000 patients, *(e)* between 1,000 and 3,000 patients and *(f)* fewer than 1,000 patients.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available centrally in the form requested.

Prescription Charges

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on NHS prescription and other charges and the value of optical vouchers from 1st April 1992.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I shall shortly lay before the House regulations providing for increases in prescription charges in the National Health Service in England and Wales which will take effect on 1 April 1992. The prescription charges will increase by 35p from £3·40 to £3·75 for each quantity of a drug or appliance dispensed. Spectacle vouchers—which are available to people on low incomes—go up by 9·5 per cent.

Concurrently regulations are being laid by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to increase the charges in Scotland by the same amount. Similar arrangements will apply in Northern Ireland.

The new charge will continue to represent less than half the average total cost of a single prescription item to the NHS. The existing wide-ranging exemption arrangements will remain unchanged. Rates for prepayment certificates will rise in line with the increase in prescription charges. A prescription charge is now paid on about one item in six dispensed in the NHS. When the Government took office, one item in three attracted a charge. In 1990-91, the drugs bill was nearly £2·1 billion. The increase will raise about £240 million for the NHS.

Charges for elastic stockings and tights, fabric supports and wigs supplied through the hospital service will also be increased from 1 April 1992 by a similar percentage to the rise in the prescription charge.

There is no change to the proportional charge—75 per cent.—for general dental services. However the maximum charge will be raised to £225 with effect from 1 April 1992.

I am pleased to announce that as from 1 April 1992 the overall value of optical vouchers will increase by 9·5 per cent. I have also, in response to representations increased the number of voucher bands from six to eight so as to reflect more accurately the range of manufacturer's wholesale prices.

The result of these changes will be that the majority of voucher holders will find themselves considerably better off. In particular, the value of voucher A, the commonest voucher, will increase by 20·3 per cent.; voucher B will increase by 20·1 per cent.; and users requiring complex single vision lenses will find the value of their voucher increased by 104·1 per cent.

I am also pleased to announce that from 1 April 1992 charges made to patients for the use of oxygen concentrators in the home will be discontinued.

Extra-contractual Referrals

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state for each district health authority, and the national total, the amount of money still remaining at January 1991 in budgets which have been set aside for extra-contractual referrals in 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 30 January 1992]:* Information about individual district health authorities' reserves for extra-contractual referrals is not held centrally. Our most recent information based on the regional returns made in January 1992 shows that nationally around £53 million—26 per cent.—of the reserves set aside for extra-contractual referrals remains for the last quarter of the year.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kurds

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will take steps to instigate a debate in the United Nations on the massacre of Kurd civilians in 1988, with a view to establishing a United Nations investigation into allegations of genocide related specifically to those atrocities.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Iraq's appalling human rights record is already under scrutiny at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The United Nations has appointed a special rapporteur to report on human rights in Iraq. He has our full support. These latest reports simply underline Saddam Hussein's total disregard for international norms of behaviour.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Ministers of State took part in party political activities in addition to official duties during each of their visits to Hong Kong in *(a)* February and June 1988, *(b)* January and September 1989 and *(c)* April, July and September 1990.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My noble Friend Lord Glenarthur saw fellow Conservatives in June 1988 and my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude) in April and July 1990. My noble Friend the Minister of State also met them in September 1990.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, on each of his visits to Hong Kong in *(a)* May 1988, *(b)* July 1989 and *(c)* January 1990, he took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) saw fellow Conservatives briefly during his visit to Hong Kong in May 1988, but not in July 1989 and neither did I in January 1990.

Mr. and Mrs. Orton Chirwa

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the conditions of the imprisonment of Mr. and Mrs. Orton Chirwa in Malawi; if he will make renewed efforts to seek their release; and whether he will set a date beyond which all aid to Malawi will be suspended, unless they are released.

Mr. Chalker: We have received reports that Mr. and Mrs. Chirwa's health has deteriorated because of the conditions under which they are held. We have therefore asked the Malawian Government for their release on humanitarian grounds. The Malawian Government have been informed that future aid levels will be influenced by their performance on human rights.

Human Rights

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all outstanding cases against the United Kingdom at the European Commission on Human Rights which have been declared admissible by the Commission but have not yet been considered by or referred to either the court or the Committee of Ministers, giving their names, application numbers and their subject matter.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are nine cases outstanding against the United Kingdom at the European Commission on Human Rights which have been declared admissible by the Commission but have not yet been considered by or referred to either the European Court of Human Rights or the Committee of Ministers:

Number, name and subject matter
15767/89 Clarke—discretionary life sentence
16632/90 Colman—doctors' advertising restrictions
15058/89 Darnell—length of medical disciplinary proceedings
14778/80 Higgins—provision of legal aid
15861/89 M—provision of legal aid
14310/88 Murray and others—entry and search of the family home
13195/[illegible]7 P and others—discretionary life sentences
16212/[illegible]0 R—provision of legal aid
14830/89 Yousef—immigration

Syria

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the release of Mu'taz Qutlabi, held in Fir Amn al-Dawa, Damascus, and of the imminent release of other political prisoners in Syria.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no specific information on the individual mentioned. We are trying to obtain verification and further details of the recently reported release by the Syrian authorities of 2,864 political prisoners.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps will be taken to ensure that those who suffer from myalgic encephalomyelitis will be entitled to invalidity benefit.

Mr. Scott: Entitlement to invalidity benefit does not depend on the nature of a person's incapacity for work. People suffering from myalgic encephalomyelitis may qualify if they satisfy the entitlement conditions. We have no plans to make special provision for people suffering from this particular condition.

Sick Pay

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing the different rates of statutory sick pay at current and at 1991 prices, and as percentages of gross average earnings and average earnings net of income tax and national insurance contribution, in each year since statutory sick pay replaced national insurance sickness benefit.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table.

Date	*Rate of SSP*	*Equivalent value at April 1991 Prices*	*Gross average weekly earnings*[1]	*Net weekly earnings*		*Percentages*		
				Single	*Married*	*B as percentage of D*	*B as percentage of E*	*B as percentage of F*
A	*B* *(£. p)*	*C* *(£. p)*	*D* *(£. p)*	*E* *(£. p)*	*F* *(£. p)*	*G*	*H*	*I*
6 April 1983	40·25	63·56	164·70	110·80	116·60	24·4	36·3	34·5
	33·75	53·30	164·70	110·80	116·60	20·5	30·5	28·9
	27·20	42·95	164·70	110·80	116·60	16·5	24·5	23·3
6 April 1984	42·25	63·44	178·80	120·60	127·30	23·6	35·0	33·2
	35·45	53·23	178·80	120·60	127·30	19·8	29·4	27·8
	28·55	42·87	178·80	120·60	127·30	16·0	23·7	22·4
6 April 1985	44·35	62·28	192·40	130·10	137·30	23·1	34·1	32·3
	37·20	52·24	192·40	130·10	137·30	19·3	28·6	27·1

Date	*Rate of SSP*	*Equivalent value at April 1991 Prices*	*Gross average weekly earnings*[1]	*Net weekly earnings*		*Percentages*		
				Single	*Married*	*B as percentage of D*	*B as percentage of E*	*B as percentage of F*
A	*B* (£. p)	*C* (£. p)	*D* (£. p)	*E* (£. p)	*F* (£. p)	*G*	*H*	*I*
	30·00	42·13	192·40	130·10	137·30	15·6	23·1	21·8
6 April 1986	46·75	63·71	207·50	141·70	149·00	22·5	33·0	31·4
	39·20	53·42	207·50	141·70	149·00	18·9	27·7	26·3
	31·60	43·06	207·50	141·70	149·00	15·2	22·3	21·2
6 April 1987[2]	47·20	61·71	224·00	155·90	163·00	21·1	30·3	29·0
	32·85	42·95	224·00	155·90	163·00	14·7	21·1	20·2
6 April 1988	49·20	61·90	245·80	174·80	182·00	20·0	28·1	27·0
	34·25	43·09	245·80	174·80	182·00	13·9	19·6	18·8
6 April 1989	52·10	60·67	269·50	191·30	198·90	19·3	27·2	26·2
	36·25	42·21	269·50	191·30	198·90	13·5	18·9	18·2
6 April 1990	52·50	55·86	295·60	212·80	221·10	17·8	24·7	23·7
	39·25	41·76	295·60	21[illegible]0	221·10	13·3	18·4	17·8
6 April 1991	52·50	52·50	318·90	2[illegible]	238·30	16·5	22·8	22·0
	43·50	43·50	318·90	230·[illegible]	238·30	13·6	18·9	18·3

Notes:

[1] Earnings shown are the average for full-time adult male employees.

[2] Middle rate of SSP abolished from 6 April 1987.

Child Benefit

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to increase child benefit for all children to the level it would have been if it had been uprated in line with inflation since 1987.

Mr. Scott: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear on a number of occasions, we are committed to increasing the current level of child benefit in line with inflation. Child benefit is and will remain a strong element in our policies for family support. From 1988 we have introduced extra help for families on income-related benefits which will amount to over £600 million in 1992-93. This, together with last year's increases in child benefit, means that the current level of overall expenditure on families with children is now greater than it would have been if we had simply uprated child benefit each year after 1987 in line with inflation.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing child benefit plus the national insurance long-term addition for children of *(a)* widows and *(b)* invalidity pensioners, at current and at 1991 prices, and as percentages of gross average earnings and average earnings net of income tax and national insurance contributions, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Scott: The figures, which are the same for widows and invalidity pensioners, are in the table:

A *Uprating date*	*B* *Rate of Child Benefit plus Child Dependency Increase*	*C* *Equivalent value of benefit at April 1991 prices*			*D* *Gross male weekly average earnings with amounts in column B as percentage*		*E* *Equivalent net week earnings with amounts in column B as percentage*	
					Single person		*Married couple*	
	£	*£*	*£*	*Per. cent*	*£*	*Per cent.*	*£*	*Per cent.*
November 1979	11·10	24·52	114·10	9·7	79·90	13·9	83·60	13·3
November 1980	12·25	23·47	135·10	9·1	93·40	13·1	97·80	12·5
November 1981	12·95	22·16	149·50	8·7	101·00	12·8	105·40	12·3
November 1982	13·80	22·22	160·60	8·6	107·40	12·8	112·50	12·3
November 1983	14·10	21·65	172·40	8·2	115·50	12·2	121·30	11·6
November 1984	14·50	21·22	187·40	7·7	125·90	11·5	132·50	10·9
November 1985	15·05	20·88	199·50	7·5	134·40	11·2	141·60	10·6
July 1986	15·15	20·68	210·90	7·2	143·80	10·5	151·20	10·0
April 1987	15·30	20·00	224·00	6·8	155·90	9·8	163·00	9·4
April 1988	15·65	19·69	245·80	6·4	174·80	9·0	182·00	8·6
April 1989	16·20	18·86	269·50	6·0	191·30	8·5	198·90	8·1
April 1990	16·90	17·98	295·60	5·7	212·80	7·9	221·10	7·6
April 1991	[1]17·95	17·95	318·90	5·6	230·00	7·8	238·30	7·5

[1] Where the new higher rate of Child Benefit for the eldest qualifying child applied, the Child Dependency Increase was adjusted so that the total level of support remained the same for all children.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Egypt

Ms. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much all donors are contributing to the World bank and social fund to mitigate the social impact of economic reform in Egypt.

Mrs. Chalker: We understand that the following pledges have been made to the social fund project in the Arab Republic of Egypt, in addition to an International Development Association loan of SDR105 million—$140 million—approved in June 1991:

Donors	*$ million*
European Community	140
USAID	55
Arab Fund	50

Donors	*$ million*
Kuwait Fund	50
Aub Dhabi Fund	50
Switzerland	30
Germany	30
Denmark	10
Canada	10
France	10
Sweden	10
Netherlands	6
Austria	5
UNDP	4
Norway	2
Total (including IDA)	602

Tropics (Biodiversity)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each programme supported by the Overseas Development Administration for research and development of the biodiversity of the tropics since 1987, with the funds allocated to each in each year and the annual totals.

Mrs. Chalker: We funded 62 projects on biodiversity from central research and development funds in 1987-88, 58 projects in 1988-89 and 43 projects in 1989-90. I am placing in the Library a list of projects in each year, including the total cost of each project and the cost to ODA in each financial year. Information relating to 1990-91 will be contained in ODA's report on research and development for that year, which is in preparation. ODA is one of the largest contributors to the International Board for Plant Genetics Resources.

Biodiversity Programmes

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what priority the Minister of Overseas Development has given to the forestry discipline within the Overseas Development Administration's biodiversity programmes.

Mr. Chalker: We made it clear in the ODA's publication "Biological Diversity and Developing Countries: Issues and Options", June 1991, that tropical forests, which may contain over 90 per cent. of species, have a very high priority within our support to biodiversity programmes in developing countries.

ODA Staff (Qualifications)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff of the Overseas Development Administration have qualifications in forestry.

Mrs. Chalker: Three advisers in the Overseas Development Administration's London headquarters and 17 staff at the ODA's agency, the natural resources institute, have qualifications in foresty. In addition, there are 15 similarly qualified people serving overseas on technical co-operation assignments.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1988, the Minister for Overseas Development took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mrs. Chalker: No.

Summit on the Advancement of Rural Women

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department will be sending a representative to the summit on the advancement of rural women to be held in Geneva later this month.

Mrs. Chalker: Representation will be provided by the United Kingdom mission to the United Nations in Geneva.

Horn of Africa

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government's contribution will be to the SEPHA appeal for the Horn of Africa for the period February to July 1992.

Mrs. Chalker: I have this week approved a British contribution of £23 million to the appeal. The contribution is made up as follows:

	£ million
Food Aid	
(i) Ethiopia, including Eritrea 20,000 tonnes	[1]12
(ii) Sudan 25,000 tonnes	
Non-food Aid	
(i) UNHCR activities in the Horn	5
(ii) British NGO humanitarian activities in the Horn	6
	23

[1] Approximate.

This pledge is additional to the £107 million, including 185,000 tonnes of food aid and our share of EC emergency aid, which we have committed for humanitarian relief in the Horn of Africa since the present crisis began in September 1990. The food aid total included £2·2 million for Somalia which I announced in January this year.

International Fund for Agricultural Development

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why it has been decided not to contribute funds to the special famine relief programme run by the International Fund for Agricultural Development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will reconsider his decision not to make available funds to assist the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development's special programme for Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 12 February.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Press Freedom

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy on the freedom of the press; and what steps have been taken to implement his policy since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The Government are committed to safeguarding the freedom of the press. They consider this is best secured by responsible journalism and effective self-regulation. In pursuit of this policy the Government have supported the recommendations of the Calcutt committee for a non-statutory Press Complaints Commission. We are committed to reviewing the effectiveness of the new arrangements later this year.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Durham Education Authority

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil by Durham education authority in *(a)* current expenditure and *(b)* capital expenditure in 1979 and 1990.

Mr. Fallon: Spending per pupil in nursery schools, primary schools and secondary schools in Durham is shown in the table. The table shows actual spending in 1979-80 and in 1989-90, the latest year for which the information is available, at both current and 1989-90 prices.

Year	*Current prices*		*1989-90 prices*[3]	
	Net institutional expenditure[1] *per pupil*[2] *(£)*	*Capital expenditure per pupil (£)*	*Net institutional expenditure*[1] *per pupil*[2] *(£)*	*Capital expenditure per pupil (£)*
1979-80	505	30	1,010	60
1989-90	1,430	55	1,430	55

[1] Net institutional expenditure covers the direct costs in schools of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, home to school transport, LEA central administration, and financing costs of capital expenditure.

[2] The figures are derived from Durham Local Education Authority's returns of its spending to the Department of the Environment and of its pupil numbers to the Department of Education and Science.

[3] Figures for 1979-80 have been repriced to 1989-90 prices using the GDP (market prices) deflator index.

Taxonomic Research

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's policy on the funding of taxonomic research in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department funds research through its grants from the science budget to the research councils and through the higher education funding councils which provide block grants to higher education institutions.

In deciding the overall level of funding to be made avaialble, and the allocation of the science budget to individual research councils, the Government take account of advice from the funding councils and from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. It is then for individual research councils and higher education institutions to decide how to deploy the resources made available to them, including the level of funding for taxonomic research.

Student Grants

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing mandatory grant levels for students pursuing first degree courses, at current and at constant 1991 prices in each year since 1979; and if he will also show net maximum parental contributions as percentages of average earnings in the same years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The table shows the value of the mandatory grant[1], in cash terms and at 1991 prices, and the maximum assessed parental contribution as percentage of average earnings for 1979-80 to 1991-92. The contribution assessed for parents on average earnings in any year would be considerably less than the maximum contribution figure shown in the table. Further, the assessed contribution for any parent cannot exceed the maintenance grant to which the student is entitled.

Academic year	*Grant in cash terms*	*1991 value of grant*	*Stautory maximum contribution*	
			In cash terms	*As per cent. of average earnings*
	£	£		
1979-80	1,245	2,832	n/a	n/a
1980-81	1,430	2,807	n/a	n/a
1981-82	1,535	2,705	n/a	n/a
1982-83	1,595	2,620	n/a	n/a
1983-84	1,660	2,593	n/a	n/a
1984-85	1,775	2,648	n/a	n/a
1985-86	1,830	2,578	4,000	45
1986-87	1,901	2,600	4,300	45
1987-88	1,972	2,589	4,600	44
1988-89	2,050	2,543	4,900	43
1989-90	2,155	2,485	5,300	42
1990-91	2,265	2,355	5,800	42
1991-92	2,265	2,265	5,800	39

n/a = Not applicable. Between 1979-80 and 1984-85 there was no statutory maximum parental contribution.

Note:

Rate applicable to students living away from the parental home and studying at an institution outside London. From 1990-91 student loans were available of up to £420 in 1990-91 and £580 in 1991-92 (at the outside London rate).

NORTHERN IRELAND

Circaprint NI Ltd.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date Circaprint NI Ltd. went into receivership; which company was appointed as receivers; what action has been taken to date by the appointed receivers to enable redundant workers to receive moneys to which they are entitled; and if he will seek to expedite settlement of outstanding claims lodged by former employees.

Mr. Needham: Joint administrative receivers were appointed to the parent company Circaprint Holdings Plc on 5 April 1991. No receiver was, however, appointed to Circaprint (NI) Ltd. and the Department of Economic Development has therefore undertaken, under article 47 of the Industrial Relations (NI) Order 1976, to discharge such of the functions of a receiver as are necessary to ensure that former employees of the Northern Ireland company receive payment of holiday pay, pay in lieu of notice and redundancy payments to which they are entitled.

It is anticipated that qualifying claims will be paid not later than the end of February 1992.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total value of grants paid towards the cost of all plant and equipment including installation costs from start up until closure of Circaprint NI Ltd.

Mr. Needham: £949,721.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in December 1989, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Needham: No.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish figures showing the total budget of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service in Wales in each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Curry: The budgetary costs for the Agricultural Development Advisory Service, as currently constituted in Wales for the last three years and the current year to date are as follows:

	£000's
1988-89	[1]5,950
1989-90	[1]5,878
1990-91	[1]5,780
[2]1991-92	3,541

[1] Includes costs of Trawsgoed experimental husbandry farm transferred to the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research on 31 March 1991.

[2] To end December 1991.

Prior to this separate delegated budgets for Wales are not identifiable, and figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people are currently employed by the Agricultural Development Advisory Service in Wales; and if he will publish the total numbers employed within each experimental husbandry farm.

Mr. Curry: There are currently 177 permanent staff employed by the Agricultural Development Advisory Service in Wales and 12 of these staff are employed at Pwllpeiran experimental husbandry farm.

Mink Farming

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that mink farms do not release mink into the wild.

Mr. Maclean: All mink farms are inspected annually by Ministry officials to ensure that they meet the security standards required by the Mink (Keeping) Regulations 1975, as amended.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements his Department has made to consult interested parties before preparation of a draft EC directive on dietary supplements.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) on 6 February, *Official Report*, column 450.

Pollution Control

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures the Government intends to introduce to enable United Kingdom farmers to meet new pollution control requirements.

Mr. Curry: As my right hon. Friend the Minister announced on 21 January, a pilot study will be set up to see if farmers can reduce water pollution by preparing and implementing plans for the safe disposal of animal manure, slurry and other organic wastes. Later this year the Department will issue a code of good agricultural practice for the protection of air. These will supplement existing measures including 50 per cent. grant aid for waste storage facilities and free general advisory visits by the Agricultural Development Advisory Service on pollution avoidance.

Tropical Forest Resource Group

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the work programme of the tropical forest resource group at the royal botanic gardens, Kew.

Mr. Curry: The tropical forest resource group, which was launched on 29 January 1992, is a consortium of 11 organisations including the royal botanic gardens at Kew. Its aim is to provide information and expertise to project and policy developers worldwide in the areas of forest management and conservation, agroforestry and related land use. Kew's role will be to provide support in its special fields of taxonomic research on plants and fungi, with additional capabilities in experimental research, seed storage and horticulture.

Agricultural Land

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to how many consultations from local planning authorities relating to individual planning applications for non-agricultural development his Department responded in each six months since January 1988; if he will provide for each period the number of objections, conditional objections, appraisals, no objections and cases which were either withdrawn or in which the referal was inappropriate; and how many hectares of each grade of agricultural land, including 3a, 3b and 3c, were involved in each period.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested for England and Wales is as follows:

	1 January 1988 to 30 June 1988	*1 July 1988 to 31 December 1988*	*1 January 1989 to 30 June 1989*	*1 July 1989 to 31 December 1989*	*1 January 1990 to 30 June 1990*	*1 July 1990 to 31 December 1990*
Total number of consultations	775	715	648	648	692	747
Objections	17	14	19	14	16	10
Conditional response	114	96	59	53	76	77
Appraisal	344	282	305	360	401	470
No objection	238	215	89	80	67	44
Withdrawn	24	12	15	13	15	19
Wrong referral	38	96	161	128	117	127
			Hectares			
Grade 1	172·9	870·3	802·4	154·6	252·4	226·5
Grade 2	1,171·7	1,183·0	1,600·9	1,729·0	2,442·9	2,739·6
Grade 3a	2,733·2	2,911·2	3,025·3	2,715·9	2,992·9	2,395·9
Grade 3b	4,897·4	4,666·3	4,396·1	2,632·7	4,568·2	4,337·8
Grade 3 (no sub-division)	1,509·5	1,520·2	1,757·3	3,857·2	5,623·9	6,155·0
Grade 4	947·2	859·9	939·8	1,042·0	1,243·3	2,108·7
Grade 5	190·1	374·4	143·5	215·2	427·3	192·5
Other land	4,249·1	3,671·9	6,321·1	5,218·8	5,188·4	8,506·9

Note:
"Conditional response" includes both conditional acceptances and objections.

Revised guidelines and criteria introduced for grading the quality of agricultural land provided for two subgrades of grade 3 land: 3a and 3b, the latter being a combination of the previous 3b and 3c.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, colums *445-46*, if he will list for each year since 1980 the number of applications which were rejected by his Ministry and were subsequently refused by the local authorities concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The records do not show this information.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the amount of agricultural land in England in each grade, including 3a and 3b, in *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1992.

Mr. Gummer: The published agricultural land classification maps and data are based on strategic planning work carried out in the 1960s and do not sub-divide grade 3 land. The original survey showed the proportion of land in each grade in England to be as follows:

	per cent.
Grade 1	3·3
Grade 2	16·7
Grade 3	54·0
Grade 4	15·7
Grade 5	10·3

The agricultural land classification maps and data provide only a very general indication of the distribution of land quality. Resurveying at a larger scale is necessary to obtain a definitive grade for individual sites.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Agriculture Council on 10 to 11 February.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting of the Council together with my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), Parliamentary Secretary in my Department, and my noble Friend Lord Strathclyde, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland.

Discussion concentrated on the Commission's proposals for CAP reform. The Portuguese presidency presented a new compromise paper which may have moved matters forward by a small amount, but major divergencies of view remain. I was one of several Ministers who said that they would not be able to come to final decisions until the outcome of the current GATT round were known. Otherwise I maintained the United Kingdom position on the lines I have explained to the House on several occasions. Discussion will resume at the next meeting of the Council starting on 2 March.

The Commissioner said that he would bring forward a package of structural proposals, which were intended to help the Community's soft fruit industry. This follows the representations I have made about the difficulties caused for the United Kingdom industry by low-priced imports from eastern Europe.

Bananas

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the consequences of the proposal in the draft general agreement on tariffs and trade text, that import controls on bananas should be converted into a tariff on African, Caribbean and Pacific banana producers.

Mr. Gummer: The draft general agreement on tariffs and trade text calls for all border measures other than ordinary customs duties applying to agricultural products to be converted into tariff equivalents and for current access opportunities to be maintained on terms at least equivalent to those existing. The tariff equivalent would in principle be applied to all dollar banana imports above current access volumes. It is unclear whether the tariff equivalent would have to be paid on African, Caribbean and Pacific sendings above their current level; nevertheless, fruit up to that volume would continue to enter the Community duty free.

Common Agricultural Policy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the amount in pounds sterling spent on the common agricultural policy in 1991; what are the current forecasts of expenditure for 1992, 1993 and 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The amount spent on the common agricultural policy in 1991 was £24,105 million[1]. The common agricultural policy budget for 1992 is £27,836 million[1]—which includes £697 million[1] for the monetary reserve. It is not normal practice to forecast anticipated expenditure for subsequent years, which depend on decisions yet to be taken.

[1] Converted at £:1·435 ecu.

Food Imports

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the amounts and types of fruit, vegetables and meat with country of origin for food imported into the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1991.

Mr. Gummer: Volumes and values of imports are published in the monthly CSO Business Monitor "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom"—MM20—which is available in the Library of the House. Table III of this monitor gives both monthly and year-to-date data at the five-digit SITC level, classified by main country of consignment, not necessarily the country of origin. Figures for the first 11 months of 1991 are available in the November 1991 edition; the December 1991 edition, which will contain provisional figures for 1991, will be available later this month. Final annual figures are published in Business Monitor MA20; the 1990 edition is available in the Library of the House and the 1991 edition will be available by the end of 1992. Country of origin figures are not published but are available from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, normally through its appointed marketing agents.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 24, on BSE deaths, if he will give a month by month breakdown of the figures given for the cattle dying at age two and three.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is as follows. The figures differ from those in the previous answer as further cases with a date of onset during 1991 have been confirmed.

Month of onset 1991	*Age at onset*	
	2 to 3 years	*3 to 4 years*
January	10	205
February	6	228
March	5	315
April	6	351
May	6	344
June	4	362
July	5	394
August	3	437
September	3	247
October	0	173
November	0	87
December	0	20

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest information as to the age at death of cattle diagnosed as suffering from BSE so far this year.

Mr. Maclean: Only five cases of cattle suffering from BSE have so far been confirmed in Great Britain which have a date of clinical onset in 1992. Their ages were one each at three, five and six years, and two at four years.

EMPLOYMENT

Older Workers

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce special measures to help unemployed older workers re-enter the work force.

Mr. Jackson: A wide range of unemployment and training measures is already available to help older unemployed people back to work. We are also keen that all employers should give proper recognition to the qualities that older workers possess. We are therefore, setting up an advisory group on older workers, as announced by my right hon. and learned Friend on Tuesday 11 February, *Official Report*, columns 809-21. The group will have an important role to play in the identification and dissemination of good practice in the employment of older workers.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps have been taken to formulate new legislation to prevent unfair dismissal for all on grounds of age, to provide job security for older workers and to prevent age discrimination in job advertisements and in recruitment, in-service training, promotion and education.

Mr. Jackson: None. We do not believe that legislation is the way to tackle these issues.

Health and Safety

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was *(a)* the number of health and safety inspectors employed, *(b)* the number of visits made, *(c)* the number of incidents investigated and *(d)* the number of prosecutions for health and safety offences, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Forth: The total number of inspectors in post in the Health and Safety Executive for each year since 1979 is as follows:

Year	Total inspectors[1]
1 April 1979	1,426·5
1 April 1980	1,444·5
1 April 1981	1,404·0
1 April 1982	1,323·5
1 April 1983	1,276·5
1 April 1984	1,239·0
1 April 1985	1,266·0
1 April 1986	1,231·5
1 April 1987	[2]1,204·5
1 April 1988	1,165·0
1 April 1989	1,182·5
1 April 1990	1,239·0
1 April 1991	[3]1,342·0
1 February 1992	[3]1,421·0

[1] Includes inspectors on non-inspection duties eg line management, contributing to policy or technical standards.

[2] Industrial Air Pollution Inspectorate transferred to the Department of the Environment on 1 April 1987.

[3] Includes inspectors in Railway Inspectorate and Offshore Safety Division who transferred to HSE in December 1990 and April 1991 respectively.

Information on the total numbers of visits made and incidents investigated since 1979 is either not available on a consistent basis or could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The available information on the number of visits made and incidents investigated by HSE inspectors since 1983-84 is as follows:

Year	Number of visits	Number of incidents investigated[1]
1983-84	[2]30,078	[7]10,153
1984-85	[3]209,058	[7]10,449
1985-86	[4]227,637	[7]7,061
1986-87	[3]241,436	[7]9,877
1987-88	231,436	[8]10,742
1988-89	229,429	[9]12,335
1989-90	234,389	[10]11,556
1990-91	[5]229,079	[9]10,862

Notes:

[1] Incidents investigated are included in the total number of visits.

[2] Data for HSE's Agricultural Inspectorate (AI) only.

[3] Data for HSE's Factory Inspectorate (FI) and AI only.

[4] Data for FI, AI, and HSE's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and Inspectors in HSE's Technology Division.

[5] Data for all Inspectorates, including HSE's Mines and Quarries Inspectorate (MQI).

[6] Excluding Railway Inspectorate.

[7] Accidents and incidents investigated by FI only.

[8] Accidents, incidents and dangerous occurrences investigated by FI and AI and cases of disease/ill health investigated by AI.

[9] Accidents, incidents and dangerous occurrences investigated by FI, AI, MI and QI; and cases of disease/ill health investigated by AI.

[10] Accidents, incidents and dangerous occurrences investigated by FI, AI, MI and QI.

Information on the total number of prosecutions for health and safety offences since 1979 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The available data on the number of informations laid by HSC/E enforcing authorities (excluding local authorities) since 1979 is as follows:

Date of hearing[1]	Number of informations laid[2]
1979[3]	2,427
1980[3]	2,624
1981[4]	1,892
1982[4]	2,351
1983	2,238
1984	2,209
1985	2,321
1986-87	2,199
1987-88	2,337
1988-89	2,328
1989-90	2,653
1990-91[5]	2,292

[1] From 1979 to 1985, based on calendar years. 1986-87 onwards, based on year commencing 1 April.

[2] Includes, for Scotland, charges preferred.

[3] Data for FI and AI only.

[4] Data for FI, AI, and MQI only.

[5] Provisional figure.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many fatal and major injuries were reported to the factories inspectorate in each year since 1979 in each *(a)* region and *(b)* sector.

Mr. Forth: The available information is provided in the tables. Prior to 1981, the only analysis available is of fatal injuries to employees by industry sector.

Table A: Fatal and major injuries reported (a) to HSE's factory inspectorate, 1981 to 1990-91 (provisional) by HSE administrative area (b)

Fatal injuries

HSE administrative area	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	[1]1990-91
01 South West	12	21	25	21	20	20	21	16	25	18
02 South	13	10	20	18	12	14	24	21	26	18
03 South East	24	26	27	26	27	19	39	29	28	27
04-06 Greater London	44	38	46	36	56	46	60	61	47	47
07 East Anglia	14	17	14	20	19	16	18	19	21	10
08 Northern Home Counties	6	14	11	21	16	15	12	10	16	6
09 East Midlands	13	18	14	11	14	13	14	11	13	17
10 West Midlands	16	17	21	14	15	9	19	18	6	11
11 Wales	25	31	22	31	21	26	34	20	28	27
12 Marches	14	13	15	15	8	9	7	19	14	15
13 North Midlands	17	17	19	20	19	13	13	17	24	16
14 South Yorkshire and Humberside	13	19	20	16	17	18	13	19	[8]113	18
15 West and North Yorkshire	26	24	25	28	[7]83	24	13	27	17	21
16 Greater Manchester	15	14	18	17	20	14	13	26	24	22
17 Merseyside	12	13	18	22	21	12	16	10	15	11
18 North West	11	18	22	27	6	12	17	13	16	15
19 North East	22	24	12	20	18	19	17	14	32	11

HSE administrative area	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*[1]1990-91*
20 Scotland East	29	27	36	27	22	23	20	32	26	25
21 Scotland West	36	36	19	26	22	14	20	26	19	22
Unclassified	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	362	397	404	416	[7]436	336	390	408	[6]510	357

Table A: Fatal and major injuries reported (a) to HSE's factory inspectorate, 1981 to 1990-91 (provisional) by HSE administrative area (b) (continued)

[2]Major injuries

HSE administrative area	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*[1]1990-91*
01 South West	1,218	1,411	1,338	1,383	1,354	1,757	1,421	1,329	1,438	1,328
02 South	482	335	803	825	980	1,636	1,724	1,615	1,805	1,782
03 South East	825	1,044	1,137	1,154	1,189	1,879	1,834	1,482	1,500	1,448
04-06 Greater London	992	1,274	1,428	1,491	1,448	3,184	2,728	2,522	2,128	1,873
07 East Anglia	803	959	806	385	891	1,772	1,995	1,880	1,344	982
08 Northern Home Counties	446	411	602	668	562	778	735	939	881	729
09 East Midlands	403	668	722	699	703	1,508	1,215	1,303	1,339	1,287
10 West Midlands	941	925	970	1,017	1,067	1,703	1,525	1,619	1,519	1,482
11 Wales	788	638	669	820	936	1,452	1,393	1,521	1,413	1,423
12 Marches	569	484	551	707	507	1,236	973	936	1,003	1,035
13 North Midlands	723	852	834	896	917	1,892	1,835	1,868	1,955	1,182
14 South Yorkshire and Humberside	1,014	763	881	919	808	1,793	1,509	1,501	[6]2,142	1,342
15 West and North Yorkshire	781	767	866	960	1,205	1,422	1,421	1,401	1,582	1,584
16 Greater Manchester	909	776	907	766	860	1,476	1,312	1,426	1,373	1,250
17 Merseyside	1,083	893	1,048	1,202	1,214	1,969	1,200	1,196	1,088	1,082
18 North West	656	824	761	882	709	1,236	1,486	1,436	1,244	1,076
19 North East	1,062	556	548	595	656	1,706	1,664	1,596	1,443	1,481
20 Scotland East	724	647	612	755	710	1,603	1,634	1,606	1,443	1,352
21 Scotland West	661	660	539	546	515	958	946	1,090	1,010	1,138
Unclassified	1	58	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	15,081	14,945	16,022	16,670	17,231	30,960	28,550	28,266	[6]27,650	24,856

Table B: Fatal and major injuries reported (a) to HSE's factory inspectorate, 1979 to 1990-91 (provisional) by industrial sector

Fatal injuries

Industry sector[4]	*[5]1979*	*[5]1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*[1]1990-91*
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Energy and water supply industries	12	13	12	17	13	38	26	12	14	13	14	5
Manufacturing industries	149	122	116	130	126	132	109	99	86	93	113	85
Construction	149	165	128	131	151	124	139	138	155	150	160	125
Service industries	89	87	104	119	114	122	[7]162	87	135	151	[6]222	142
Unclassified	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	399	387	362	397	404	416	[7]436	336	390	408	[6]510	357

Table B: Fatal and major injuries reported (a) to HSE's factory inspectorate, 1979 to 1990-91 (provisional) by industrial sector (continued)

Major injuries[2]

Industry sector[4]	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*[1]1990-91*
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3	4	3	4	2	6	11	11	11	16
Energy and water supply industries	226	229	219	242	239	587	503	443	418	435
Manufacturing industries	4,078	4,066	4,255	4,686	4,805	7,230	7,100	7,244	7,239	6,677
Construction	1,763	2,032	2,298	2,431	2,430	3,312	3,455	3,757	4,195	3,877
Service industries	8,912	8,583	9,224	9,288	9,755	19,707	17,253	16,661	[6]15,623	13,607
Unclassified	99	31	23	19	0	118	228	150	164	244
Total	15,081	14,945	16,022	16,670	17,231	30,960	28,550	28,266	[6]27,650	24,856

Footnotes to tables (A) and (B):

[1] Provisional.

[2] Injuries at work to employees and self-employed persons and members of the public injured as a result of someone else's work activity reported under various pieces of legislation, but chiefly the 1961 Factories Act for the calendar years prior to 1981, under the Notification of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrencies Regulations (NADOR) for the calendar years 1981 to 1985, and under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) for the subsequent financial years commencing 1 April 1986.

[3] The analysis is provided by Health and Safety Executive administrative area.

[4] Standard Industrial Classification 1980 divisions, aggregated to sector level.

[5] Fatal injuries to employees only.

[6] Data include the 95 fatalities and 766 major injuries to members of the public arising from the Hillsborough Stadium disaster.
[7] Data include the 56 fatalities to members of the public in the Bradford City Football Club fire disaster.
[8] Introduced under NADOR on 1 January 1981. Definition extended under RIDDOR, 1 April 1986.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1990, he took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Howard: No.

Job Losses

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has issued on action taken by training and enterprise councils, the Employment Service and others in response to job losses, with particular reference to the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has recently published an information pack entitled "Local Action for Employment—Tackling Job Losses", which contains information on the help available from training and enterprise councils—TECs—and the Employment Service —ES—when redundancies occur, and on the part local action groups can play in responding to job losses. The pack contains specific examples of best practice by TECs, the ES and local action groups in redundancy situations.

The pack will be made available to companies incurring job losses and to other agencies and individuals interested in local action in response to job losses. The pack should be of assistance in helping respond to job losses on the Isle of Wight, as elsewhere. The pack may be of interest to hon. Members and copies have been placed in the Library.

Wages Councils

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many workplaces were covered by wages councils in the northern region in 1981 and 1991; how many were visited by wage council inspectors; how many were found to be paying below wage council rates; and how many were prosecuted.

Mr. Forth: The information for the northern region is as follows:

	Workplaces covered	*Workplaces visited*	*Workplaces paying below rate*	*Number of employers prosecuted*
1981	21,848	1,281	[1]na	1
1990	21,529	1,547	455	2
1991	[1]na	[1]na	[1]na	2

[1] Not available.

The information for 1981 relates to the Wages Councils Act 1979and information for 1990 and 1991 to the Wages Act 1986. Figures are included for 1990 because the full information for 1991 is not yet available.

WALES

Farm Investment

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of investment in plant and machinery on farms in Wales for the last year for which full figures are available; and what are the corresponding figures both at outturn and real prices for each since 1987.

Mr. David Hunt: Investment in plant and machinery on Welsh farms, in current terms and at constant 1985 prices, for 1991 and in each year since 1987 is shown in the table.

Investment in Plant and Machinery

	Current terms £ Million	*Current 1985 prices £ Million*
1991	21·0	16·0
1990	23·0	18·0
1989	26·0	21·0
1988	27·0	23·0
1987	26·0	24·0

Home Helps

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the population over the age of 75 years currently receive home help in each county in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The provision of home helps for households where at least one person is aged 75 or over and the rate per 100 households is given in the following table:

	Number[1]	*Rate per 100 household*[2]
Clwyd	4,801	25·2
Dyfed	3,297	20·4
Gwent	7,227	41·8
Gwynedd	2,934	22·7
Mid Glamorgan	11,[illegible]	57·7
Powys	918	16·6
South Glamorgan	5,628	35·5
West Glamorgan	4,853	31·2
Wales	40,863	33·6

[1] As at 31 March 1990.
[2] Number of households where the head of household is aged 75 or over as estimated by the Welsh Inter Censal Survey 1986.

Day Care Places

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many day care places per 10,000 population under the age of five years are currently available in each county within Wales; and what the equivalent figures were for each from 1979 to date.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The numbers of full-time day care places provided in day nurseries and by childminders are given in the tables:

Day care places provided by local authorities and other registered premises/persons for children aged under five

as at 31 March

	Clwyd	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Wales*
1979									
Number	178	—	153	—	127	10	492	40	1,000
Rate	76·4	—	59·8	—	36·6	16·1	213·9	18·3	60·0
1980									
Number	178	—	154	—	127	10	447	10	926
Rate	77·1	—	59·2	—	36·0	16·1	191·8	4·5	55·2
1981									
Number	205	—	93	40	127	10	385	44	904
Rate	85·8	—	33·9	30·5	35·8	15·4	160·4	19·6	52·5
1982									
Number	221	—	116	60	127	—	366	44	934
Rate	90·6	—	42·6	44·8	35·8	—	148·8	19·5	53·8
1983									
Number	236	—	116	60	145	—	338	130	1,025
Rate	97·1	—	41·9	43·5	40·1	—	132·5	56·8	57·8
1984									
Number	253	—	116	60	260	—	397	140	1,226
Rate	102·4	—	41·9	43·5	71·6	—	152·1	61·7	68·9
1985									
Number	327	—	116	66	157	—	427	150	1,243
Rate	133·5	—	41·6	47·5	43·6	—	163·0	66·4	70·1
1986									
Number	332	—	116	77	136	30	466	129	1,286
Rate	135·5	—	40·7	56·6	37·5	46·2	175·8	56·6	71·9
1987									
Number	383	—	116	89	210	50	488	135	1,471
Rate	153·2	—	40·0	64·0	57·4	75·8	178·1	59·0	80·8
1988									
Number	425	—	131	67	184	76	538	135	1,556
Rate	165·4	—	44·3	45·9	49·9	111·8	190·1	58·2	83·7
1989									
Number	688	56	131	189	117	81	609	305	2,176
Rate	261·6	25·9	43·2	128·6	31·1	115·7	210·7	130·9	114·8
1990									
Number	911	44	374	208	228	85	766	318	2,934
Rate	345·1	20·5	122·6	140·5	60·5	119·7	263·2	135·9	153·9

All rates refer to rate per 10,000 population under 5 years.

Day care places provided by registered childminders for children aged under five

as at 31 March

	Clwyd	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powis*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Wales*
1979									
Number	279	142	117	218	255	45	378	58	1,492
Rate	119·7	77·2	45·7	160·3	73·5	72·6	164·3	26·6	89·6
1980									
Number	402	191	151	231	289	59	499	45	1,867
Rate	174·0	103·2	58·1	171·1	81·9	95·2	214·2	20·5	111·2
1981									
Number	362	219	172	149	489	50	632	110	2,183
Rate	151·5	112·3	62·8	113·7	137·7	76·9	263·3	49·1	126·7
1982									
Number	271	266	232	187	587	83	695	175	2,496
Rate	111·1	137·1	85·3	139·6	165·4	125·8	282·5	77·4	143·7
1983									
Number	376	232	283	185	886	95	696	196	2,948
Rate	154·7	114·3	102·2	134·1	244·8	146·2	272·9	85·6	166·4
1984									
Number	634	269	357	248	1,667	114	869	314	4,472
Rate	256·7	133·2	128·9	179·7	459·2	178·1	333·0	138·3	251·4
1985									
Number	634	287	415	307	980	135	1,006	436	4,200
Rate	258·8	144·9	148·7	220·9	272·2	214·3	384·0	192·9	237·0
1986									
Number	894	309	468	268	1,157	157	1,013	511	4,777

	Clwyd	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powis*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*Wales*
Rate	364·9	153·0	164·2	197·1	318·7	241·5	382·3	224·1	267·0
1987									
Number	849	344	494	330	1,309	193	1,230	553	5,302
Rate	339·6	167·0	170·3	237·4	357·7	292·4	448·9	241·5	291·3
1988									
Number	1,002	331	572	292	1,272	231	1,636	613	5,949
Rate	389·9	156·1	193·2	204·2	344·7	339·7	578·1	264·2	319·8
1989									
Number	1,315	595	777	450	1,582	293	1,992	748	7,752
Rate	500·0	275·5	256·4	306·1	420·7	418·6	689·3	321·0	408·9
1990									
Number	1,318	684	931	449	2,101	327	2,361	830	9,001
Rate	499·2	318·1	305·2	303·4	557·3	460·6	811·3	354·7	472·2

All rates refer to rate per 10,000 population under 5 years.

Agricultural Holdings

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the change in the average size of agricultural holdings in Wales in each year from 1988 to 1991, inclusive.

Mr. David Hunt: The average area of main holdings in Wales for the years requested is as follows:

	Average area per holding (hectares)
1988	49·7
1989	49·0
1990	50·4
1991	50·2

Immunologist (College of Medicine)

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action his Department is now taking regarding the establishment of a consultant immunologist at the University of Wales college of medicine.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department is seeking expert guidance on the possibility of establishing a post of consultant immunologist with appropriate staff at the University of Wales college of medicine.

Elderly and Disabled People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what level of funding will be made available by his Department in 1992-93 in response to local authority bids in relation to Welsh Office circular 56/91 on central funding for elderly people and those with physical and/or sensory disabilities.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I will make an announcement soon.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *573-74*, how much money was withheld or recovered each year under the set-aside scheme in Wales since 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

Set-aside year	*Amount withheld (£)*
1988-89	2,015·40
1989-90	2,015·40
1990-91	23,283·20

Agricultural Land

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount of agricultural land in Wales in each grade, including 3a and 3b, in *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1992.

Mr. David Hunt: The published agricultural land classification—ALC—maps and data are based on strategic planning work carried out in the 1960s and do not sub-divide grade 3 land. The original survey showed the proportion of land in each grade in Wales to be as follows:

	Per cent.
Grade 1	0·2
Grade 2	2·3
Grade 3	17·5
Grade 4	44·2
Grade 5	35·8

The ALC maps and data provide only a very general indication of the distribution of land quality. Resurveying at a larger scale is necessary to obtain a definitive grade for individual sites.

Rail Services

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the effect of the citizens charter on British Rail's operations in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I expect Wales to fully share the benefits, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, of British Rail's passengers charter which will be published shortly.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will pay an official visit to Shotton, Clwyd, using the rail service provided from Crewe.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend visited Shotton in November. There are no plans for any further visits at present.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings he has had with local authorities and

British Rail to discuss the upgrading of the Crewe, Holyhead and Paddington, Swansea lines including electrification.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend and I have had several meetings with British Rail. My right hon. Friend last met Sir Bob Reid on 30 September. On 29 October my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport and I met senior British Rail executives and local authority representatives in Holyhead.

A wide range of Welsh rail issues have been discussed including upgrading of lines and electrification.

Roads

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of his plans to improve road communications between north and south Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Government's policy is to continue to upgrade the A470 and A483 by means of selective improvements. Those in progress or planned on the north-south network are:

A470

1 Pentre Bach—Cefn Coed
2 Crew Pitch
3 Storey Arms Phase II
4 Storey Arms Phase III
5 Felinfach By Pass
6 Builth Wells By Pass/Llanelwedd Junction (is also part A483)
7 Smithfield Bends
8 Diversion East of Llangurig—Wern Villa
9 Carno Road Caersws
10 Commins Coch By-Pass
11 Improvements at Bwlch Oer Ddrws
12 Maes yr Helmau—Cross Foxes Phase I & II
13 Gelligemlyn—Llanelltyd Diversion Phase I & II
14 Ty Nant—Maentwrog Road Railway Station
15 Salem Place—Ty Mawr
16 Lledr Valley Improvements
17 Llanrwst By-Pass
18 Penloyn—Tanlan
19 Pentrefelin—Croesau
20 Llanbrynmair
21 Ffridd Fawr
22 Pentre Mawr
23 Tanyard Pitch
24 Irfon Bridge Bends (S of Newbridge on Wye)
25 Llandinam Village
26 Clatter Village
27 Caersws River Bridge

A483 (North of Builth Wells)

1 Brynsadwrn Bends and Bridge
2 Maes yr Abad—Wern Bridge
3 Welshpool Relief Road
4 Croesfoel Roundabout—Grade Separation
5 Newtown By Pass
6 Pant—Llanymynach By Pass (Welsh Section)
7 Side support, Llythddu
8 Glascoed and Bends
9 Howey Village By Pass

Health Authorities (Deficits)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which health authorities in Wales have reported current and expected year-end deficits.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Discounting inter-year brokerage and planned movements in balances which can distort an authority's true financial position, only Mid Glamorgan HA has indicated that its overall expenditure in accruals terms, including that of its managed units in providing services for other authorities, will exceed its overall income in 1991-92. However, the scale of variance above planned expenditure is marginal, amounts to £0·5 million or 0·2 per cent. of its projected overall income. This will be covered either by a short-term cash loan from another authority or by a small movement in balances which I would expect to be rectified in 1992-93.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether, on his visit to Hong Kong in September 1988, the Minister of State took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on cervical smear tests in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The all-Wales advisory group on cervical screening was established in March 1990 with the aim of formulating a unified policy for the cervical screening programme in Wales. The advisory group report was recently submitted to my right hon. Friend and will shortly be issued for consultation.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children in Wales use the assisted places schools scheme giving *(a)* the numbers for each of the schools operating the scheme, *(b)* the amounts received by each of the schools and *(c)* estimating the numbers for the next school year.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is as follows.

School	*Overall totals of APS pupils September 1991*[1]	*Payments to schools for fees remitted 1990-91* £
Christ College, Brecon	76	244,081
Howell's School, Denbigh	69	231,442
Howell's School, Llandaff	159	358,798
Llandovery College	48	140,381
Monmouth School	147	303,951
Monmouth School for Girls	73	140,618
Penrhos College	50	183,500
Rydal School	39	153,508
Total	661	1,756,279

[1] Form AP0 school returns to Department.

Numbers of pupils in the assisted places scheme from September 1992 will depend on the number of new entrants and those who have left school in the previous year. However, we estimate that there will be some 685 APS pupils in the next academic year.

Housing Association (Empty Properties)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Housing Association properties were empty on the last date for which figures are available; and for how long.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* Information collected by Housing for Wales shows that at 31 March 1991 the position was as follows:

	Vacant and available for letting	*Vacant and not available for letting ie undergoing or awaiting works*[1]	*Awaiting sale*
Less than six months	163	197	60
Six months to one year	14	132	8
Over one year	7	247	0
Total vacant	184	576	68

[1] Largely rundown properties purchased for renovation.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce his decision on local government reorganisation in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* At the appropriate time, following further consideration of the issues.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Office Costs Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he now expects to receive the Top Salaries Review Body report on the office costs allowance.

Mr. MacGregor: I expect to receive the report on the office costs allowance from the Top Salaries Review Body shortly.

DEFENCE

HMS Bristol

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Bristol was paid off; and which ship will replace her as the Dartmouth training ship.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Bristol was paid off on 14 June 1991. Her replacement for the period 15 June 1991 to 14 December 1991 was HMS Fearless. Until initial sea training is introduced in the spring, sea-going training is being provided by HMS Ariadne, HMS Broadsword and HMS Brazen.

Devon Training Squadron

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his future plans for the Dartmouth training squadron; how trainees will gain seagoing experience; and what effect these arrangements will have on the effectiveness of operational Royal Navy ships.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The sea going training provided in the Dartmouth training squadron will be replaced by initial sea training—IST—with effect from spring 1992. Young officers will undertake IST in type 22 batch 1 frigates which have been modified to provide the extra accommodation required. The operational effectiveness of the ships will be maintained in between officer training periods by their normal ships' companies.

RNR Port Diving Branch

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his intention to make the services of Royal Navy clearance divers available to assist civil authorities following the disbandment of the Royal Naval Reserve port diving branch.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Royal Navy clearance diving teams can provide assistance to the civil authorities on a repayment basis when this can be done without detriment to their operational tasks. There are no plans to change this policy.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the requests for assistance made by civil authorities to the Royal Navy Reserve port diving branch in each of the last seven years; giving the occasions on which such services were rendered;

(2) what payments have been received by his Department in each of the last seven years from civil authorities for services rendered by the Royal Naval Reserve port divers branch;

(3) under what arrangements the services were rendered to civil authorities by Royal Naval Reserve port divers for *(a)* the search in the Thames following the sinking of the Marchioness, *(b)* the search of the berth of the Queen Elizabeth II in Southampton, *(c)* the survey of Her Majesty's customs vessel in Newcastle, *(d)* inspections following hurricane damage in Dover harbour and *(e)* the search of Glencorse reservoir in Midlothian to assist a police murder inquiry.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Suicides

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers who have served at Fallingbostel in the last three years have committed suicide during that time.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A driver in the Royal Corps of Transport committed suicide in Fallingbostel on 11 October 1991. Additionally, a private in 1 Cheshires stationed in Fallingbostel committed suicide on 10 January 1992 while on leave in the United Kingdom.

Information is not held centrally to identify whether those soldiers who committed suicide in other places during the past three years may have been attached, or temporarily posted, to units in the Fallingbostel area.

Fallingbostel

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers have gone absent-without-leave from Fallingbostel since January 1989; and how many of those have been granted a full discharge.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Terrorists (Compensation)

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims have been made against the MOD in respect of fatalities and injuries which have occurred from activity by the security forces against terrorists in each of the last five years; and what sums have been paid in compensation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Claims data are not kept in the format requested. While a number of claims are received each year, the recorded data do not distinguish between terrorists and other parties.

Data Information Systems

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what data information systems his Department has *(a)* agreed and *(b)* been consulted about with a view to taking part in; what are the criteria for inclusion in such systems; whether they will be linked to (i) the police national computer and (ii) other computer systems; what data protection provisions apply to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence currently has no data information systems physically linked to any external systems. Discussions are now taking place between the Department's security branches and the national identification bureau to allow direct access to the police national computer, PNC. Such access would not permit the exchange of information or the interrogation of an individual's criminal record and would, as now with manual inquiries, be governed by the PNC procedures which comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984.

Al-Yamamah Project

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will publish the size of receipts, and payments, and end-year balances, on the handling accounts operated by him as part of the Al-Yamamah I project;

(2) if he will list the quantities and values of items acquired by the British Government under the buy-back provisions of the Al-Yamamah I project.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not the Government's practice to comment on detailed matters concerning individual defence export sales.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the handling accounts of the Al-Yamamah I project are audited; and whether these accounts have been the subject of audit reports.

Mr. Alan Clark: All accounts of the Ministry of Defence are subject to normal audit arrangements, the results of which are reported as appropriate.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department seeks the recoup of any handling charges on departmental costs from the handling accounts forming part of the Al-Yamamah I project.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes.

RAF Greenham Common

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received notification of United States intentions in respect of the future of RAF Greenham Common; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United States Department of Defence announced on 30 January 1992 the decision to withdraw from RAF Greenham Common in autumn 1992, returning the station to full Ministry of Defence control. We are now considering options for the future use of the base, including scope for other defence uses. Our studies are at an early stage, however, and no decisions have yet been taken.

NAAFI

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will underwrite the NAAFI to ensure that funds are available to meet staff redundancy payments and rehousing costs in case of any financial difficulties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The financial implications of the reductions in force strengths on NAAFI are currently being considered.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give NAAFI staff who lose their accommodation under the options for change process the same options on rehousing as those being offered to ex-service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. NAAFI staff are not Ministry of Defence employees and not subject to the practical constraints on entering the housing market that apply to service personnel.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current approved staffing level for the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich; and how many posts remained unfilled in each main specialty at the most convenient recent date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The peacetime establishment of the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich, is 175 officers, 395 other ranks and 147 civilians. On 11 February 1992, 127 posts were unfilled in the following specialties:

	Posts
Anaesthetics and Resuscitation	2
Ear, Nose and Throat (Otology)	2
General Medicine	1
General Surgery	4
Ophthalmology	2
Orthopaedics	2
Plastic Surgery (and Burns)	2
Rheumatology and Rehabilitation	1
Urology	2
Supporting Staff	109

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the estimate operating costs of the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich, for the current financial year together with the actual costs for the preceding five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the latest available figures of bed occupancy at the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich, for each of the main specialties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Records are not kept of bed occupancy by specialty. The occupancy rate for 1990-91 for the hospital was 65·6 per cent., excluding bedded day patients.

Armed Services (Medical Support)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the current review of medical support for the armed services to be completed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces expects to receive the conclusions and recommendations within the next few months.

Hong Kong (Ministerial Visits)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether, on their visits to Hong Kong in January and March 1988, the Ministers of State took part in party political activities in addition to official duties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ministers at the Ministry of Defence meet fellow Conservatives from time to time in the margins of public duties both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

23 Base Workshop, Wetter

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of 23 base workshop, Wetter, Germany; and when it will be closed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A study into the Army's requirements for static workshops is now in progress. No decisions have yet been taken.

Trident

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the fourth Trident submarine to *(a)* be ordered and *(b)* begin construction.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We plan to place the order following the completion of contract negotiations with Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. Construction of the vessel under long-lead funding arrangements has already begun.

SCOTLAND

Toll Bridges

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the figures for the *(a)* annual income and cost and *(b)* capital debt outstanding for toll bridges in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest published figures for toll bridges in Scotland are as follows:

	Erskine[1] *1989-90* *£ million*	*Forth* *1990-91* *£ million*	*Tay* *1990-91* *£ million*
Annual income (tolls revenue)	2·3	7·2	2·1
Annual cost (operating expenses including non-recurring expenditure)	0·9	3·6	[2]2·7
Other charges	[3]13·2	1·1	0·6
Total expenditure	14·1	4·7	3·3
Outstanding deficiency	95·5	11·0	6·9

[1] There is no real debt at Erskine Bridge. The bridge was built from the funds available for trunk road expenditure in Scotland. Expenditure was borne on what is now the Roads (Scotland) Vote. However, the accounts are compiled, under Treasury direction, in such a way as to show the deficiency which would exist if the bridge had been funded by borrowing.

[2] Includes £1·8 million extraordinary repairs financed from the Tay Road Bridge Joint Board's General Reserve Fund.

[3] Comprises amortisation, interest and notional sinking fund advances.

Government Grants

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what Government grants were awarded for *(a)* ferry services and *(b)* bridge projects in Scotland listed by region, for each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following grants and subsidies were awarded:

£ million

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Tariff rebate subsidy for P and O services to Orkney and Shetland	3·5	3·8	4·2	4·3	5·0
Tariff rebate subsidy to Coastal Shippers	0·9	1·0	1·04	1·0	1·6
Deficit subsidy for Caledonian MacBrayne	7·4	6·2	5·3	5·5	5·5
Capital grant for pier works undertaken by Caledonian MacBrayne	0·4	0·44	0·71	0·61	0·17
Capital grant for local authority piers and harbours	1·84	0·47	1·05	2·7	2·32
Capital grant for independent harbour trusts, piers and harbours	0·012	0·006	—	—	0·043
Capital grant to British Waterways Board:					
Bridge repairs to Strathclyde region	0·08	0·1	0·1	0·04	0·04

Cardiologists

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of cardiologists per million population in Scotland at the latest available date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of whole-time equivalent consultant cardiologists per million population in Scotland was 3·7 as at 30 September 1991, the latest date for which information is available centrally. This data are provisional and do not include general physicians who have a special interest in cardiology.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Strathclyde as to what proportion of the clear-up rate for crime in his area in 1990-91 is accounted for by voluntary admissions by convicted criminals; how many detectives are employed to obtain these admissions; and when the practice ceased.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Such practices are not part of the approach to detection employed by Scottish police forces. Strathclyde police have no record of any voluntary admissions obtained in this way.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, columns *413-14*, if he will now give the figures for 1990-91.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:

Region	*Serious irregularity (a)*	*Minor breach (b)*	*Payment withheld (c) in full*	*Payment withheld (c) in part*
Borders	—	3	—	3
Central	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	1	—	1
Grampian	—	16	2	14
Highland	—	1	—	1
Lothian	—	—	—	—
Tayside	—	7	—	7
Others	—	—	—	—
Total	—	28	2	26

This information is provisional, as a small number of claims are still outstanding.

Health Service

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give each, for each health board in Scotland, the amounts paid in August 1991 by the prescription prescribing division to suppliers of colostomy and ileostomy appliances.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 February 1992]:* It is not possible to separately identify colostomy and ileostomy prescriptions for August 1991 at the present time. Following are the amounts paid in August 1991 in respect of all prescriptions dispensed in August 1991 by appliance contractors. The information on appliance prescriptions dispensed by chemists is not readily available.

Health Board	*Gross Value £*
Grampian	2,400·37
Greater Glasgow	74,152·70
Highland	26,344·92
Lothian	70,354·45
Tayside	54,209·09
Scotland	227,461·53

Forestry Commission Land

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the land owned by the Forestry Commission which is currently up for sale, giving the name, amount of land involved and the length of time it has been on the market, in each county or region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* The following forest areas are at present being offered for sale on the open market.

County/region and name	*Area (Hectares)*	*Period on the market (Months)*
ENGLAND		
Avon		
Camerton Wood	19	29
Cornwall		
Hay Wood	54	18
Treworgey	17	18
Devon		
Brownsham Woods	71	18
Deershill Wood	11	18
Never Be Good Wood	10	18
Pulsworthy	3	18
Dorset		
Alders Coppice	7	6
Blackwater Copse	13	6
Hampshire		
Bordean Estate, Fishers Copse	28	36
Mill Copse	6	9
Roke Mead Copse	9	24
Tapnell	50	7
Norfolk		
Blackwater Plantation	4	1
Northumberland		
Colleylaw	8	29
North Yorkshire		
West Gateforth	47	15
Shropshire		
Coed Detton	14	18
Somerset		
Barrow Wood	13	16
Church Wood	6	17
Fry's Wood	24	29
Higher Bitcombe	30	17
Lower Bitcombe	18	17
South Yorkshire		
Black Carr	20	6
Green Springs	12	15

County/region and name	*Area (Hectares)*	*Period on the market (Months)*
Old Park	41	10
Walker Wood	6	15
Wiltshire		
Chittoe Heath	19	7
Kidney Bean	3	7
Lower Selves	10	7
New Plantation	8	7
SCOTLAND		
Borders		
Cardrona	3	28
Dumfries and Galloway		
Glaik	63	21
Knockinaam	30	21
Lochnaw Estate (part)	57	21
Lochnaw Estate (part)	56	21
Lochnaw Estate (part)	18	21
Tinwald Downs (land at)	2	8
Fife		
Drumtennant Strip	4	9
Rameldry West	8	9
Grampian		
Barlatch	3	8
Berry Hill Woods	130	5
Cummingston Smithy	6	5
Drakemyres	32	9
Hillend Moss	16	11
Knock Hill Wood	56	11
Maryculter	8	7
Mormond Hill	255	4
Tertonie	7	7
Woogle	26	7
Highland		
Cuileannach Woodlands	237	2
Strathclyde		
Carrick Wood	70	4
Daljarrock	52	21
Dalamirren	1,202	3
Tobermory Grazings (part)	11	2
Tobermory Grazings (part)	1	2
Todlaw	370	8
WALES		
Clwyd		
Coed Pen Y Gelli	29	8
Coed Esgynfa	6	8
Glol Plantation	27	8
Dyfed		
Aberdedle Wood	7	7
Allt Banc Sina	18	10
Allt Fawr	7	16
Allt Ffos Colic	18	14
Allt Llwyn Dyfrion	11	10
Allt Pistyll Dewi	33	10
Cilfowyr	5	14
Coed Ffridd Cwmere	20	19
Coed Gwastad	28	24
Coed Pant y Gasseg	3	16
Coed Rhyd Tir	16	19
Coedmore, Coed Newydd	17	24
Coedmore, Home Farm Wood	3	24
Cwm Cynfelin	8	40
Cynheidre Uchaf	24	7
Danygraig	10	10
Ffynon Lefrith	25	27
Gallt y Cribin	7	14
Glebe Woods	17	10
Glynllydan	8	1
Letterston Moor	15	32
Lon Isaf	7	7
Lower Scourfield	13	19
Maestwynog	12	27
Pant Eynon and Allt y Forlan	29	10
Pencwm Fawr	9	16
Penhill Wood	4	16
Portis Pant	30	10
Rams Wood	26	19
Scolton	30	7
Tanyrallt	6	27
Troserch	35	16
Tynton Wood	4	16
Waun Baglan Woods	26	23
Wenallt	17	7
Gwent		
Coed Cae Cendl	10	5
Coed Gastellau	48	5
Craig Y Merchant	24	5
Darren Ddu	8	5
Gorrashill	8	20
Hafodrisclawdd	23	5
Luggas Wood and Youngs Grove	15	18
Gwynedd		
Coed Ty Uchaf	15	8
Coed Dyfi	17	19
Glyn Estate	49	4
Moel Groes Heol	130	9
Powys		
Coed Tyllys	12	14
Craig Yr Henffordd	8	7
Cwmbach and Cwmcoch	44	19
Great Wood	9	19
Pwll Llydan	31	7
West Glamorgan		
Craig Ynysgollen	10	54
Gelligaer	33	44

Training Schemes

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many youth training trainees in Scotland left schemes without receiving any recognised qualifications on the most recent figures available.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* I regret that this information is not available because no precise count is made of the number of young people leaving youth training in Scotland.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what qualifications have been obtained by participants on youth training and employment training places in Scotland in the past five years.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Participants on youth training and employment training obtain a very wide variety of qualifications, but full and detailed information on the identity of those qualifications is not held centrally.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has about the training performance of local enterprise companies.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* The responsibility for monitoring the training performance of local enterprise companies rests with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. They have reported regularly to my right hon. Friend that the Government's guarantees on youth training and employment training are being met and that the needs of the aim group for employment training are also being catered for. In addition, regular management information on a variety of aspects of training performance is beginning to be submitted; and my right hon. Friend and I also receive a variety of less systematic information from diverse sources. The overall picture which emerges is that local enterprise companies are securing effectively the delivery of training programmes which are increasingly better matched to local economic circumstances and focused on securing a steady improvement in quality of provision, including improvements in the achievement by trainees of qualifications.

Ethnic Minority Grants

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what ethnic minority grants, along the lines of those available through training and enterprise councils in England and Wales, are available to refugees and ethnic minorities in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 12 February 1992]:* There is no precise equivalent in Scotland to the ethnic minority grants available through training and enterprise councils in England and Wales; but local enterprise companies have a broader range of powers than training and enterprise councils, which enables them to assist members of ethnic minorities in a variety of ways.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each year since 1974 the numbers of patients on hospital in-patient waiting lists at 31 March.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: For any individual patient, the waiting time is more significant than the number of patients on the waiting list. The key to reducing waiting times is to increase the number of patients treated. Measured by discharges this has increased by 24 per cent. since 1979. The waiting list has been reduced by 21 per cent. over the same period.

This is shown in the table:

NHS hospitals: in-patient waiting lists and discharges at 31 March

Year	*Number on List*	*Number of Discharges*
1974	[1]56,182	[1]717,964
1975	[1]53,770	[1]697,410
1976	54,442	738,633
1977	53,974	746,259
1978	56,987	738,012
1979	76,968	737,816
1980	70,195	764,301
1981	67,908	785,080
1982	66,880	793,171
1983	96,933	744,436
1984	85,543	809,681
1985	79,262	821,588
1986	81,249	837,044
1987	81,324	842,524
1988	[2]67,226	871,287
1989	[2]61,011	882,347
1990	[2]58,287	895,790
1991	[2]60,693	912,370

[1] Information available only at 30 September.

[2] From 1988 the figures are based on an improved statistical collection system and are not strictly comparable with those collected in earlier years.

Racial Equality

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to assist the voluntary sector in Scotland to promote racial equality and a reduction of racial disadvantage.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am pleased to announce today the introduction of a new ethnic minority grant to assist voluntary organisations in Scotland with projects designed to promote racial equality and reduce racial disadvantage.

The new grant which has a budget of £100,000 will complement the existing funding regimes such as the urban programme and the support given to ethnic minority projects under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The new grant will in particular assist the voluntary sector to operate projects on a Scottish or regional level which cannot readily be funded under existing arrangements.

The Government have long recognised the benefits that can accrue from an active voluntary sector and the new grant will support voluntary organisations in their efforts to encourage and co-ordinate assistance to ethnic communities. My officials will be writing to relevant voluntary organisations with details of the scheme.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 14 February 1992

ENVIRONMENT

Dewsbury Rugby League Club

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make an announcement on the planning application by Dewsbury rugby league club at Owl lane, Dewsbury, Ref. GO/62/04666/82.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment expects to announce his decision about the planning application shortly.

Toxic Wastes

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the proposals put forward by the International Chetek Corporation to destroy toxic wastes through vaporisation by underground nuclear explosions.

Mr. Baldry: We have seen reports of the proposals but no approach has been made to us by the company about them and we do not know the details. However, we would expect to take a very cautious approach to the use of peaceful nuclear technology for waste disposal.

Nuclear Waste Repository

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *303*, he will set out those organisations and individuals with whom UK Nirex Ltd. is consulting over its current proposals for an underground nuclear waste repository.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for UK Nirex Ltd.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Community Charge (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Attorney-General what action he intends to take to initiate proceedings to have Liverpool city council's city treasurer declared a vexatious litigant.

The Attorney-General: I have no plans to initiate proceedings of this kind.

Housing Repossessions

Mr. Hain: To ask the Attorney-General how many orders for repossession were granted in favour of building societies, banks or the mortgage lenders by the county court covering Neath in 1979, 1990 and 1991.

The Attorney-General: The 1979 figures are not available. The total number of mortgage possession actions entered, suspended orders and orders made during 1990 and 1991 in each county court in England and Wales is contained in two lists which have been placed in the libraries of both Houses of Parliament. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all of the orders made will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession. At this stage the 1991 figures are provisional and therefore liable to revision in the future.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Circaprint NI Ltd

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total cost to public funds of grants paid towards site acquisition and construction of the former Circaprint NI complex at Newtownabbe[illegible] Co. Antrim.

Mr. Needham: The total grant paid by the Industrial Development Board to Circaprint (NI) Ltd towards the purchase of, and improvements to, the factory buildings at Monkstown amounted to £219,378.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Industrial Development Board or Department of Economic Development will receive any repayment of grants as a result of the sale of Circaprint NI Ltd. including all grant aided plant and equipment.

Mr. Needham: The Industrial Development Board has claimed sums repayable by Circaprint (NI) Ltd. To date no repayments have been made.

Belfast Airport

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *521*, which political parties have used the facilities now available at Belfast international airport.

Mr. Needham: The management of Belfast international airport is a matter for Northern Ireland Airports Ltd. However, I am advised by them that facilities at the airport have been hired by the Conservative party.

Scientific Procedure Establishments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of inspectors employed to monitor scientific procedure establishments in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Three.

Traffic Cameras

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many automatic cameras have been installed at traffic-light-controlled junctions; and how many more are planned this year.

Mr. Needham: Seventeen closed circuit television cameras have been installed for traffic signal control purposes. No additional cameras are planned this year.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Regional Service Centre (Devon and Cornwall)

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has reached a decision on the location of his Ministry's regional service centre for Devon and Cornwall.

Mr. Gummer: Following a further study, I have concluded that Devon and Cornwall will be served by two centres. The regional service centre, with 72 regional administrative posts, will be at Exeter; and the region's capital grant work will be carried out by a unit of 20 posts at Truro. The decision to keep a unit in Cornwall reflects my conclusion that the Ministry's responsibilities for agriculture and the general health of the rural economy are best served by maintaining an administrative presence in this isolated and remote part of the country.

This decision means that in total there will be 99 posts in Truro when account is taken of the ADAS state veterinary service and other MAFF posts which continue to be located there. The overall impact on jobs in the Truro office is minimal.

Mink Farming

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent information he has received about the decline in mink farming.

Mr. Curry: The number of mink farms in England and Wales has halved over the last three years.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teacher Training

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what date he received from the Council for Accreditation of Teachers in Education its report on the review of the training of teachers to teach reading; and when he proposes to make the report publicly available.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend received the report on 31 December. It will be issued in due course.

Schools (Finance)

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his announcement of 11 February, "More Capital for Popular Schools", if he will identify *(a)* any additional sums of money for this purpose and *(b)* the rule whereby voluntary-aided schools could be allowed to expand only where there were no spare places in county schools nearby.

Mr. Fallon: The decision on the additional resources to be set aside each year to enable popular schools to expand will be taken in the light of next year's public expenditure.

It has hitherto been the policy of successive Governments not normally to make capital available to allow voluntary-aided schools to expand their capacity where there are spare school places in other maintained schools in the area.

Adult Education

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state, in relation to his Department's survey of local education authority expenditure on adult education *(a)* how many authorities were contacted, *(b)* the names of the authorities, *(c)* the level of expenditure on further and adult education in each case, with the averages for the sample, *(d)* the level of expenditure identifiable as relating to adult education, with the average for the sample and *(e)* the definition of further and adult education employed; and if he will deposit the survey in the Library.

Mr. Eggar: The Department's survey related to all expenditure on further education colleges and adult education centres in the financial year 1989-90. It asked LEAs to divide this expenditure between education of the type set out in schedule 2 to the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]* and other education. It was addressed to all LEAs in England except those in Inner London, which were not in existence in 1989-90, but were sent a copy of the survey for information. Responses have been received from over 70 LEAs but a consultant has been employed to seek out further responses and to examine the position in Inner London. The consultant's report is expected towards the end of this month and I will deposit a copy in the Library. However, it is not the practice to disclose individual responses to Government surveys.

Business Sponsorship Scheme for Sport

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the business sponsorship scheme for sport.

Mr. Atkins: I am happy to announce today further details of how the business sponsorship scheme for sport is to operate in England. We aim to start the scheme as soon as possible in the coming financial year. Its initial funding in England, where it will be run by the Institute of Sports Sponsorship, will be £3 million.

The scheme will provide a much needed boost to business sponsorship of sport at the grass roots level, ensure that business gets better value for its sponsorship and promote partnership between sport and business at the local level. It will be aimed particularly at the inner cities and at promoting opportunities for young people. Since it is targeted at the grass roots, national events in the sporting calendar will be excluded and it will not cover sponsorship of individuals.

Subject to the discretion of an indpendent panel, the awards will match first time sponsors pound for pound with a minimum of £1,000 and a maximum of £75,000. Existing sponsors seeking to renew their sponsorship of a grass roots event or project will also be eligible for pound for pound matching of any increase in their sponsorship.

It will be open to either the sponsoring company or the sports body to apply for the award of matching finance. Each award will be used by the sports body to enhance the value of the sponsorship and offer the sponsor an even better deal. The award will be paid to the sports body once the sponsor had made his own contribution.

There is no limit to the number of awards a business can receive. The scheme will be open to applicants throughout the year for any eligible sports events or projects, whatever the size of the sports body.

The scheme will be available throughout Great Britain. Details of how it will operate in Scotland and Wales will be announced later.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Hungary

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid the United Kingdom has provided to Hungary to help her deal with refugees from the conflict in the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The European Community has so far contributed some 2 million ECU to the refugee problem in neighbour countries of the former Yugoslavia, mainly via UNHCR and ICRC. UNHCR has itself recently carried out a mission in Hungary and is now preparing a budget for this year's activities. This will enable it to continue helping the Hungarian authorities provide basic assistance and secure conditions in anticipation of early repatriation. We are major contributors in both the EC and UNHCR.

Joint Funding Scheme

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide details of how the joint funding scheme of the Overseas Development Administration is monitored.

Mrs. Chalker: All agencies receiving funds through the joint funding scheme are required to provide annual audited accounts which separately identify the joint funding scheme grant.

Five agencies to which we provide block grants to finance a number of projects are required to provide a project description for all new projects and, each quarter, to submit a statement of project expenditure showing the duration of the project and the total financial commitment. Each agency provides an annual report on all continuing projects. All other agencies supported under the scheme are required to submit financial reports on their projects at least every six months. Progress reports are required annually and a final report is called for on the completion of each project.

Review visits to selected projects are carried out at least twice a year by advisers and officials. Evaluations of specific projects are carried out by professional advisers on an ad hoc basis.

Overall expenditure is monitored throughout the year to ensure that the scheme's financial targets are met.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a full list of countries in which joint funding scheme projects were implemented, for the most recent year.

Mrs. Chalker: A full list of countries in which the joint funding scheme projects were implemented in the last financial year is as follows:

Afghanistan
Angola
Bangladesh
Belize
Benin
Bhutan
Bolivia
Botswana
Brazil
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Chad
Chile
China
Colombia
Dominica
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Fiji
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Guinea Bissau
Haiti
Honduras
India
Indonesia
Jamaica
Jordan
Kenya
Laos
Lebanon
Lesotho
Madagascar
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Mali
Mauritania
Mexico
Morocco
Mozambique
Namibia
Nepal
Nicaragua
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Rwanda
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Sri Lanka
St. Lucia
Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Thailand
Togo
Uganda
Uruguay
Vanuatu
Vietnam
West Bank
Yemen Arab Republic
Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much Government assistance was provided to voluntary agencies through the joint funding scheme in each year from 1985 to 1990, in cash and real terms.

Mrs. Chalker: The amount of Government assistance provided to voluntary agencies through the joint funding scheme in each year from 1985 to 1990 was as follows:

Cash terms

	£ actual
1985	4,765,068
1986	5,367,279
1987	6,410,954
1988	9,790,591
1989	15,050,146
1990	19,786,309

Real terms (1990-91 prices)

	£ actual
1985	6,382,427
1986	6,946,604
1987	7,904,414
1988	11,330,125
1989	16,285,327
1990	19,786,309

Malawi

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all United Kingdom overseas aid which directly benefits Malawi in the current year; and if he will provide details of his present plans for 1992-93.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1990 (the latest year for which comprehensive figures are available), British bilateral aid to Malawi comprised the following:

	£ million
Project aid	12·0
Technical co-operation	6·6
Programme aid (balance of payments support)	9·6
Aid and trade provision	0·2
Debt relief	1·7
Investments by the Commonwwealth Development Corporation	7·1
Total gross bilateral aid	37·2

In 1992-93, we shall continue our efforts to reorient the programme away from large-scale infrastructure projects and towards projects in the social sectors of more direct benefit to the most vulnerable social groups. We have meanwhile made clear to the Malawi Government that future levels of programme aid in particular will take account of performance on human rights issues.

Renewable Natural Resources

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implementation of the renewable natural resources research strategy since April 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) on 19 December 1991 at column *232*.

EMPLOYMENT

Work Permits

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those countries where nationals need a work permit to gain employment in Britain.

Mr. Forth: Nationals of all countries, except member states of the European Community and Gibraltar, need a work permit to gain employment in Britain, unless the individual is covered by another provision of the immigration rules.

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many work permits have been issued over the past five years; and if he will list the countries of origin of those to whom permits have been granted.

Mr. Forth: The number of work permits issued over the past five years to 31 December 1991 is 111,478; the countries of origin of those to whom permits have been granted are as follows:

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Andorra
Angola
Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Australia
Austria

Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belize
Benin
Bermuda
Bolivia
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burma
Burundi

Cambodia
Cameroon
Canada
Cape Verde
Cayman Islands
Chile
Colombia
Commonwealth of Dominica
Congo
Costa Rica
Cuba
Cyprus

Czechoslovakia

Dominican Republic

Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Estonia
Ethiopia

Fiji
Finland

Gabon
Gambia

German Democratic Republic
Ghana
Greece
Grenada
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana

Haiti
Hungary

Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Ivory Coast

Jamaica
Japan
Jordan

Kenya
Kuwait

Latvia
Lebanon
Lesotho
Liberia
Libyan Arab Republic
Liechtenstein

Madagascar
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Mali
Malta
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mexico
Monaco
Mongolia
Montserrat
Morocco
Mozambique

Namibia
Nepal
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Niger
Nigeria
North Korea
Norway

Oman
Other Commonwealth

Pakistan
Panama
Papua and New Guinea
Paraquay
Peoples Republic of China
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Puerta Rica

Qatar

Romania
Rwanda

San Marino
Sao Tome and Principe
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Somalia
South Africa
South Korea
Spain
Sri Lanka
St Helena
St Kitts and Nevis
St Lucia
St Vincent
Sudan
Suriname
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Syrian Arab Republic

Taiwan
Tanzania
Thailand
Tibet
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Turks and Caicos Islands

Uganda
United Arab Emirates
United States of America
Uruguay
USSR

Venezuela
Vietnam
Virgin Islands

Western Samoa

Yemen Arab Republics
Yugoslavia

Zaire
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Note:
In addition, a number of permits were issued to stateless people.

Industrial Tribunals

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether it is his intention to provide more industrial tribunal members and premises to cope with the increased workload following changes to training contracts to permit employers to recover training costs from employees who leave their employment.

Mr. Forth: Industrial tribunal membership and premises are always kept under review in the light of the tribunals' work load.

Training Costs

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) whether it is his intention that employees who leave their employment prematurely because they feel they *(a)* are not being given enough responsibility or *(b)* are being denied promotion unfairly will have to pay their employer a proportion of their training costs;

(2) whether it is his intention that employees who leave their employment prematurely because *(a)* their new job is

closer to home or *(b)* the hours in the new job are more convenient will have to pay the first employer a proportion of their training costs;

(3) whether it is his intention that employees who leave their employment prematurely because they dislike the boss will have to pay a proportion of their training costs;

(4) whether it is his intention that employees who leave their employment prematurely because *(a)* of sexual harassment, *(b)* they are being treated unfairly by a supervisor or *(c)* they are being denied equal pay for work of equal value in the first job will have to pay their employer a proportion of their training costs;

(5) whether it is his intention that employees who leave their employment prematurely because *(a)* they prefer a workplace that is organised by a trade union or *(b)* they realise they will never find the particular job congenial will have to pay their employer a proportion of their training costs.

Mr. Jackson: The Government's White Paper, "People Jobs and Opportunity" (cm. 1810) invited views on how the law relating to the enforceability of training contracts might be clarified, and the procedure for enforcing such contracts simplified. Such contracts between employer and employee are voluntarily entered into, and their terms a matter for the parties not for Government. We are not proposing to alter that position. The Government will take a decision on how to proceed on clarifying the law relating to their enforceability only when it has had the chance to consider the results of its consultation.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements he proposes to make to ensure that the public sector compensates the NHS for the employment of staff trained by the NHS.

Mr. Jackson: None. The White Paper "People, Jobs and Opportunity" invites comments on how to clarify the law on the enforceability of training contracts. The terms of any such contracts are a matter for negotiation between individual employers and their employees.

Foreign Nationals

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many foreign nationals are in full-time employment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: The available estimates from the Labour Force Survey show that in the spring of 1990 there were 768,000 foreign nationals in full-time employment in the United Kingdom.

Employment Training

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many representations he has received requesting the age limit to be raised in employment training programmes.

Mr. Jackson: We receive representations from time to time about the age limit in ET. The requirement that trainees enter training before their 60th birthday reflects our concern to ensure that participants are returning to the labour market for the longer, rather than the shorter term, and will justify the public expenditure incurred on their behalf.

HEALTH

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* doctors' surgeries, *(b)* hospitals and *(c)* clinics he has visited in the last 12 months.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Ministers and I regularly visit doctors' surgeries, hospitals and clinics in the course of our official duties.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the revenue expenditure of each regional health authority on health service facilities for patients with a mental handicap for each year since 1981, in cash terms and at 1991 prices.

Mr. Dorrell: Prior to the adoption of the recommendations of the Sixth report of the Steering Group on Health Service Information (the Korner Committee) in 1987-88, the information collected for England was incomplete and unrepresentative of the total expenditure provision for people with a learning disability (ie mental handicap). Information derived from Korner annual financial returns for the years since 1987-88 is shown in the table. Those financial returns provide a more complete indication of total expenditure but exclude general services costs and do not capture all relevant direct costs incurred within community health services.

Total revenue expenditure on services for persons with a learning disability (mental handicap)

Region	*1987-88*		*1988-89*		*1989-90*		*1990-91*
	£000 (cash)	*£000 (at 1990-91 prices)*	*£000 (cash)*	*£000 (at 1990-91 prices)*	*£000 (cash)*	*£000 (at 1990-91 prices)*	*£000 (cash)*
Northern	23,148	28,659	27,332	31,573	28,474	30,888	30,281
Yorkshire	22,913	28,369	27,158	31,373	28,360	30,765	29,400
Trent	35,107	43,466	41,144	47,530	43,638	47,339	47,843
East Anglian	14,420	17,854	17,467	20,178	20,052	21,752	21,429
North West Thames	28,592	35,400	33,964	39,236	37,316	40,481	40,215
North East Thames	26,702	33,060	31,750	36,678	34,386	37,302	35,831
South East Thames	24,516	30,354	25,701	29,690	25,858	28,051	29,077
South West Thames	39,607	49,038	45,509	52,572	48,143	52,226	50,636
Wessex	21,686	26,850	27,132	31,343	29,312	31,798	31,669
Oxford	16,395	20,299	20,205	23,340	23,144	25,107	25,519
South Western	34,983	43,313	38,395	44,354	38,088	41,317	37,164
West Midlands	37,200	46,057	43,595	50,361	46,684	50,643	49,252
Mersey	16,530	20,465	18,302	21,142	18,826	20,422	19,137
North Western	32,203	39,871	37,140	42,905	38,666	41,944	41,444

Region	*1987-88*		*1988-89*		*1989-90*		*1990-91*
	£000 (cash)	*£000 (at 1990-91 prices)*	*£000 (cash)*	*£000 (at 1990-91 prices)*	*£000 (cash)*	*£000 (at 1990-91 prices)*	*£000 (cash)*
	374,005	463,056	434,794	502,274	460,946	500,034	488,897

Source: Annual financial returns of district health authorities in England.

Notes:

1. The figures for 1987-88 (the inaugural year for the Korner returns) need to be interpreted with caution and those for 1990-91 are provisional at this stage. The figures for prior years have been expressed at 1990-91 prices by the use of GDP deflators.
2. The figures relate to hospital services revenue expenditure on the mental handicap specialty and to the cost of nursing services provided for persons with a learning disability within community health services (CHS). The hospital figures cover direct clinical and diagnostic costs only (i.e. they exclude expenditure on support and hotel services etc.). Additional pay and non-pay costs incurred within CHS which are not separately identifiable are similarly excluded.

Cholesterol Testing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for health what conclusions he has reached on the need for cholesterol testing of high risk patients; what requirements he makes for statistics to be kept on such tests either by hospitals or general practitioners; and what pilot screening programmes on patients at high risk of coronary heart disease are under way.

Mr. Dorrell: The Standing Medical Advisory Committee has reported on the cost-effectiveness of opportunistic cholesterol testing. The committee's report, issued for consultation, attracted a large number of wide-ranging responses. We have received further comment about this and related issues concerning the prevention of coronary heart disease as part of the consultation on the Green Paper "The Health of the Nation" (Cm. 1523), on which we hope to respond with a Government statement in the spring. No data are held or stipulated centrally concerning such testing or on any pilot screening programmes of patients at high risk of coronary heart disease.

Population Statistics

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current estimated number of 16 to 24-year-old males in Staffordshire and the west midlands.

Mr. Dorrell: Estimates of the number of males aged between 16 and 24 years inclusive at mid-1990 are given in the table:

	Thousands
Staffordshire	69·0
West Midlands county	182·5
West Midlands standard region	358·6

GPs (Night Visits)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by family health services authority the amount paid to the general practice with the highest claim for night visit payments in the most recent available period.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Foreign Nationals (NHS Treatment)

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many foreign nationals have received free treatment under the national health service over the past three years; and what has been the cost to the NHS of this provision.

Mrs Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Anyone not ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom has to pay for NHS hospital treatment unless he or she is covered by one of a number of specific exemptions.

Traffic Accidents (Hospital Treatments)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given by his Department to hospitals with regard to charging patients for treatment following road traffic accidents.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department issued full guidance to health authorities in 1980 in a Health Notice (HN(80)7), a copy of which is available in the Library, about the basis for recovery charges under the the Road Traffic Act. This is still extant. Health authorities are notified periodically of increases in the charges.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total amount charged by each health authority for treatment given to patients following road traffic accidents for each of the last 10 years; and if he will give the comparable figures for NHS trusts.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible.

Tobacco Advertising

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action will be taken following the failure of European Standing Committee B to support the Government's policy on a ban on tobacco advertising.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government will put a motion to the House shortly.

Cervical Cancer

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state for *(a)* each regional health authority and *(b)* each district health authority the number of women who died of cervical cancer for the most recent year available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 10 February 1992]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

The total number of deaths from cervical cancer in England and Wales in 1990 was 1,781. This represents a decrease in mortality of around 13 per cent. since 1980, when the total number of deaths was 2,068.

Number of deaths from cancer of the cervix[1] by regional and district health authority of usual residence for 1990

	Number
England and Wales	1,781
Northern RHA	119
Hartlepool	3
North Tees	7
South Tees	7
East Cumbria	10
South Cumbria	5
West Cumbria	9
Darlington	4
Durham	9
North West Durham	5
South West Durham	7
Northumberland	10
Gateshead	5
Newcastle	10
North Tyneside	12
South Tyneside	9
Sunderland	7
Yorkshire RHA	135
Hull	11
East Yorks	5
Grimsby	7
Scunthorpe	7
Northallerton	5
York	10
Scarborough	7
Harrogate	3
Bradford	20
Airedale	4
Calderdale	10
Huddersfield	4
Dewsbury	8
Leeds Western	11
Leeds Eastern	13
Wakefield	3
Pontefract	7
Trent RHA	160
North Derbyshire	14
Southern Derbyshire	17
Leicestershire	26
North Lincolnshire	6
South Lincolnshire	8
Bassetlaw	1
Central Nottinghamshire	13
Nottingham	25
Barnsley	11
Doncaster	14
Rotherham	13
Sheffield	12
East Anglian RHA	72
Cambridge	9
Peterborough	9
West Suffolk	8
East Suffolk	10
Norwich	18
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	10
West Norfolk and Wisbech	7
Huntingdon	1
North West Thames RHA	97
North Bedfordshire	8
South Bedfordshire	9
North Hertfordshire	3
East Hertfordshire	9
North West Hertfordshire	9
South West Hertfordshire	2
Barnet	5
Harrow	8
Hillingdon	1
Hounslow and Spelthorne	11
Ealing	6
Parkside	16
Riverside	10
North East Thames RHA	97
Basildon and Thurrock	12
Mid Essex	5
North East Essex	8
West Essex	7
Southend	10
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	6
Hampstead	5
Bloomsbury	4
Islington	6
City and Hackney	8
Newham	5
Tower Hamlets	8
Enfield	8
Haringey	0
Redbridge	4
Waltham Forest	1
South East Thames RHA	117
Brighton	10
Eastbourne	10
Hastings	6
South East Kent	10
Canterbury and Thanet	8
Dartford and Gravesham	6
Maidstone	4
Medway	13
Tunbridge Wells	2
Bexley	7
Greenwich	5
Bromley	14
West Lambeth	5
Camberwell	7
Lewisham and North Southwark	10
South West Thames RHA	81
North West Surrey	6
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	8
South West Surrey	5
Mid Surrey	8
East Surrey	2
Chichester	3
Mid Downs	4
Worthing	8
Croydon	10
Kingston and Esher	5
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	6
Wandsworth	6
Merton and Sutton	10
Wessex RHA	99
East Dorset	14
West Dorset	3
Portsmouth and south east Hampshire	26
Southampton and south west Hampshire	16
Winchester	1
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	5
Salisbury	5
Swindon	7
Bath	17
Isle of Wight	5
Oxford RHA	56
East Berkshire	12
West Berkshire	12

	Number
Aylesbury Vale	3
Wycombe	6
Milton Keynes	0
Kettering	7
Northampton	4
Oxfordshire	12
South Western RHA	114
Bristol and Weston	12
Frenchay	5
Southmead	7
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	19
Exeter	14
North Devon	8
Plymouth	16
Torbay	6
Cheltenham and District	5
Gloucester	11
Somerset	11
West Midlands RHA	186
Bromsgrove and Redditch	3
Herefordshire	12
Kidderminster and District	1
Worcester and District	8
Shropshire	9
Mid Staffordshire	6
North Staffordshire	22
South East Staffordshire	9
Rugby	1
North Warwickshire	4
South Warwickshire	9
Central Birmingham	4
East Birmingham	4
North Birmingham	4
South Birmingham	13
West Birmingham	10
Coventry	16
Dudley	15
Sandwell	12
Solihull	11
Walsall	8
Wolverhampton	5
Mersey RHA	123
Chester	11
Crewe	10
Halton	9
Macclesfield	5
Warrington	12
Liverpool	28
St. Helens and Knowsley	20
Southport and Formby	4
South Sefton	7
Wirral	17
North Western RHA	197
Lancaster	5
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	22
Preston	8
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble	13
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	12
West Lancashire	7
Chorley and South Ribble	7
Bolton	11
Bury	6
North Manchester	11
Central Manchester	6
South Manchester	8
Oldham	15
Rochdale	8
Salford	11
Stockport	12
Tameside and Glossop	19
Trafford	9
Wigan	7
Wales	124
Clwyd	22
East Dyfed	12
Pembrokeshire	4
Gwent	16
Gwynedd	7
Mid Glamorgan	24
Powys	8
South Glamorgan	15
West Glamorgan	16

[1] International classification of disease code 180 ninth revision.

Dental and Sight Checks

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has for the cost in 1992-93 of abolishing charges for dental check-ups and sight tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* £65 million is a provisional estimate of the full cost in 1992-93 of abolishing dental examination charges. No corresponding estimate exists for sight tests; there are no charges for NHS sight tests, which are available to approximately 40 per cent. of the population.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Foreign Nationals (Benefits)

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many foreign nationals and their dependants are in receipt of social security benefits; and what is the cost to the public purse.

Mr. Jack: Nationality is not one of the determining factors in deciding upon entitlement to social security benefits. Consequently the information requested is not available.

Social Fund Inspectors

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many applications for review by a social fund inspector were outstanding for more than one month on 31 January;

(2) how many social fund inspectors were employed on 31 January.

Mr. Scott: I am informed by the Social Fund Commisioner that on 31 January 1992, there were 69 social fund inspectors employed and 3,246 review applications outstanding for more than one month.

Correspondence

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow can expect to receive a reply to his letter of 23 December 1991, to the Minister of State, concerning a constituent's referral to a regional medical officer for examination.

Mr. Scott: I replied to the hon. Member on 27 January 1992 and will arrange for a copy of that reply to be sent to the hon. Gentleman today.

Select Committee Report

Mr. Grist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish his response to the Social Security Committee's First Report of this session, HC 18, on public expenditure.

Mr. Newton: Yesterday we laid as Cm 1822, "Public Expenditure: Response by the Government to the First report from the Select Committee on Social Security Session 1991-92."

Care Expenditure

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate for likely expenditure on income support payments towards the cost of private or voluntary nursing or residential care during the current financial year.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1992]:* The latest estimate for the 1991-92 financial year is £1,950 million.

PRIME MINISTER

GATT Negotiations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has made to the proposals made by the Vice-President of the United States of America on 9 February to link the outcome of the negotiations on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and European security commitments by the United States of America.

The Prime Minister: Vice President Quayle has confirmed publicly that he sees no link between GATT and the United States commitment to European security. Vice President Quayle and I agreed that the success of the Uruguay round was of vital importance to the world economy and that the European Community and the United States must work urgently for a successful agreement.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he discussed the implementation of safeguards arrangements arising from South Africa's membership of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty during the recent visit of President de Klerk to the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: No. South Africa has signed an exemplary safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency and preliminary IAEA inspections are already taking place.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Motor Vehicle Crime

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences of *(a)* taking a vehicle without the owner's consent and *(b)* theft of a motor vehicle were reported to the police for the years 1980 to 1991.

Mr. John Patten: Notifiable offences of theft of a motor vehicle include taking a vehicle without the owner's consent. Figures for 1980-89 are published in table 2.12 of "Criminal statistics, England and Wales, 1989" and figures for 1990 are published in Home Office statistical bulletin 13/91; copies of both publications are available in the Library. Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his proposals to reduce the incidence of car crimes.

Mr. John Patten: The Government are proposing a six-point action plan to tackle car crime.

First, the prevention of car crime will be the central feature of our crime prevention campaign in 1992, which we have designated 'Car Crime Prevention Year'. The campaign, which was launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 11 February, seeks to engage the whole community in a co-ordinated effort to tackle car crime. It comprises a broad programme of national and regional activities and is supported by an extensive Home Office funded advertising and promotional campaign that aims to increase public awareness of the cost of crime, the importance of individual and community action in combating this crime and the steps that should be taken to reduce vehicle risk.

Secondly, the motor vehicle manufacturers have a most important role to play in reducing the opportunities for car crime. My right hon. Friend and I met the manufacturers three times last year to stress the importance of improved vehicle security. The progress being made is encouraging, but much more could be done. In particular, we have stressed the need for the general introduction of effective and safe vehicle immobilisation systems, dead locks, and visible vehicle identification numbers. We are to meet again with the manufacturers next month for a report on progress.

Thirdly, it is also important that motorists should be encouraged to take vehicle security seriously, and rewarded when they do so—not just being penalised when they do not. My right hon. Friend has therefore asked the Association of British Insurers to consider further providing incentives, including reduced premiums, for owners who improve the security of their cars, and take care of them.

Fourthly, we are active on the European front. Trevi, the body which represents EC Ministers responsible for policing, has accepted our suggestion that car theft should be added to its agenda. Experts from across the Community are to meet in London on 25 February to discuss cross-border aspects of car crime. We are also pressing for the British Standard on vehicle security to be adopted as a compulsory EC directive.

Fifthly, the Government have already taken swift action to tackle the criminals who take cars. The Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill, which is being considered by the House of Lords, shows our determination to deal with the menace of those who take cars and cause damage, injury or death.

Finally, the police have the Government's full support in their fight against car crime. Provision has been agreed for up to a further 1,000 police posts in 1992-93. The police cannot, however, be expected to take on the task of detecting criminals, maintaining order and protecting the public on their own. They need the full support of the whole community.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has received from chief officers of police for an extension of the vehicle watch scheme as pioneered in Newport, Gwent, to other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: There are now more than 20 vehicle watch schemes in operation in England and Wales. Some cover whole force areas, while others are limited to police divisions or sub-divisions.

The chief officers of the Welsh forces agreed last year to extend the Gwent scheme, which had been operating for one year, to cover the whole of Wales; this was launched on 11 September 1991.

My right hon. Friend has received no representations about the further extension of vehicle watch. That is a matter for chief officers to decide. Arrangements are, however, in train for vehicle watch to be evaluated during this year, with a view to it being encouraged throughout England, if it is shown to be succesful in reducing vehicle theft.

Brixton Prison

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were received into Brixton prison in the last week for which figures are available; and for what offences they were remanded.

Mrs. Rumbold: The readily available information, which is given in the table, is based on the three weeks commencing 1 December 1991.

Average number of prisoners received into Brixton prison per week on initial committal as a remand prisoner[1]: by offence

Offence	*Number*[2]
Violence against the person	8
Rape	—
Other sexual offences	—
Burglary	4
Robbery	3
Theft and handling	6
Fraud and forgery	1
Drugs offences	2
Other offences	3
Not recorded	12
All offences	39

[1] Untried or convicted unsentenced.

[2] Rounded figures.

Crime

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of notifiable crimes committed in 1991; and what were the comparable figures for 1978.

Mr. John Patten: Notifiable offence statistics for 1978 are published in table 2.2 of "Criminal statistics, England and Wales, 1989". Figures for 1990 are published in Home Office statistical bulletin 13/91; copies of both publications are available in the Library. Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the figures for the percentage change in reported crime between 1979 and 1991 in *(a)* Neath, *(b)* south Wales and *(c)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: The available information shows that between 1979 and 1990 recorded crime increased by 94 per cent. in south Wales and 79 per cent. in England and Wales as a whole. Statistics are not collected centrally for Neath.

The British crime survey provides a measure of reported crime as experienced by adults in England and Wales. The most recent available results show that there was a 30 per cent. increase in offences measured by the survey between 1981 and 1987, as against a 41 per cent. increase in comparable recorded offences. Estimates are not available for the change in Neath or south Wales.

Figures for Scotland are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of Scotland, and figures for Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of each police force in England as to what proportion of the clear-up rate for crime in his area in 1990-91 is accounted for by voluntary admissions by convicted criminals; how many detectives are employed to obtain these admissions; and when the practice ceased.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information for police forces in England on the number of offences cleared up by an interview of convicted offenders in custody is contained in the table below. Further information is not readily available.

Offences cleared up by interview of a convicted prisoner in custody as a percentage of all offences cleared up

England *1989*

Force	*Percentage cleared up by interview of convicted prisoner*
Avon and Somerset	9
Bedfordshire	—
Cambridgeshire	6
Cheshire	25
Cleveland	9
Cumbria	10
Derbyshire	3
Devon and Cornwall	7
Dorset	13
Durham	8
Essex	5
Gloucestershire	17
Greater Manchester	33
Hampshire	7
Hertfordshire	—
Humberside	8
Kent	4
Lancashire	10
Leicestershire	11
Lincolnshire	10
London, City of	6
Merseyside	44
Metropolitan Police District	1
Norfolk	19
Northamptonshire	19
Northumbria	29
North Yorkshire	23
Nottinghamshire	—
South Yorkshire	22
Staffordshire	18

Force	*Percentage cleared up by interview of convicted prisoner*
Suffolk	1
Surrey	1
Sussex	1
Thames Valley	3
Warwickshire	15
West Mercia	18
West Midlands	34
West Yorkshire	20
Wiltshire	3
ENGLAND	16

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the clear-up rates for every police force in England and Wales during the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: The latest available figures, for 1990, are published in Home Office statistical bulletin 4/91, which is available in the Library. They are annotated as provisional in the bulletin, but only south Wales's figure has since been revised, to 36 per cent. Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the powers of Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons so that he can inspect police and court cells holding prisoners.

Mrs. Rumbold: I do not believe that it would be right to seek to extend the functions of Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons to include inspections of police and court cells. I am satisfied with the existing arrangements under which Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, in the course of his inspections of individual police forces, will take account of the standard of accommodation provided for prisoners and the general conditions in which they are held.

Young Prisoners

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15-year-olds remanded into prison in each year since 1981 were subsequently found not guilty.

Mrs. Rumbold: The readily available information is given in the table. Data for 1991 are not yet available.

Persons aged 15 on initial reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment in England and Wales who were not found guilty[1]: by year of initial remand and sex

	Male	*Female*
1981	3	—
1982	7	—
1983	11	—
1984	6	—
1985	8	—
1986	14	—
1987	20	—
1988	17	—
1989	15	1
1990	3	—

[1] Charge withdrawn or dismissed, no evidence offered on prisoner acquitted or not tried. Separate figures are not available. The data are under recorded to some extent.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15-year-old prisoners were put into strip conditions either as suicide prevention or as a punishment in 1990 and in 1991; and in which prisons.

Mrs. Rumbold: An inmate who is violent or refractory may be termporarily confined in a special cell or an unfurnished cell if this is necessary to prevent him from injuring himself or others, damaging property or creating a serious disturbance. No inmates may be placed in such accommodation as a punishment.

In 1990, six prisoners aged 15 were confined in special cells; none was for the prevention of suicide. Information on the use of unfurnished cells was not collected centrally. Data for 1991 are not yet available.

An inmate may be deprived of his clothing only if this essential to prevent him from injuring himself of others. In such cases, the inmate must be provided with a suit of protective clothing so that he can be decently dressed. No information on prisoners deprived of their clothing in this way is collected centrally.

Feltham Young Offenders Institution

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been received into Feltham young offenders institution in the last week for which figures are available; and for what offences they were remanded or convicted.

Mrs. Rumbold: The readily available information, which is given in the table, is based on the three weeks commencing 1 December 1991.

Average number of prisoners received into Feltham remand centre per week on initial committal as a remand prisoner[1]: by offence

Offence	*Number[2]*
Violence against the person	6
Rape	—
Other sexual offences	—
Burglary	15
Robbery	3
Theft and handling	14
Fraud and forgery	1
Drugs offences	—
Other offences	8
Not recorded	4
ALL OFFENCES	53

[1] Untried or convicted unsentenced.

[2] Rounded figures.

Average number of prisoners received into Feltham remand centre or young offender institution per week on initial committal as a sentenced prisoner: by offence

	Number of prisoners[1]	
Offence	*Remand centre*	*Young offender institution*
Violence against the person	1	1
Rape	—	—
Other sexual offences	—	—
Burglary	4	1
Robbery	1	2
Theft and handling	6	2
Fraud and forgery	—	—

Offence	*Remand centre*	*Young offender instituion*
Drugs offences	—	—
Other offences	5	1
Not recorded	2	—
ALL OFFENCES	20	7

[1] Rounded figures.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new project licences assessed as being of substantial severity were issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in each year since the Act came into force.

Mrs. Rumbold: Project licences assessed as being of substantial severity account for a very small proportion of all project licences issued. More detailed information is contained in the annual reports of the animal procedures committee, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new project licences authorising scientific procedures on primates were issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in each year since the Act came into force.

Mrs. Rumbold: Non-human primates receive special protection under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and may be used only where no other suitable species is available. Records held centrally on project licences issued do not identify those which authorise the use of non-human primates. Non-human primates accounted for 0·2 per cent. of animals used in scientific procedures started in 1990.

Credit Reference Agencies

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the relevant statutory provisions relating to the circumstances in which credit reference agencies may be used; and what uses are regarded by his Department as acceptable or worthy of encouragement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The relevant provisions are sections 157 to 160 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and various provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984. The Government consider that the use of credit reference agencies for inquiring into creditworthiness and ability to repay, and thus to promote responsible lending, is to be encouraged.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards are available to protect individuals *(a)* in regard to information held about them by credit reference agencies and *(b)* the way in which any such information is released by such agencies to third parties.

Mrs. Rumbold: Sections 158 and 159 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 give right of access and correction and various provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984 give rights to data subjects. Various provisions of the Data Protection Act regulate disclosure; and the expectation of the Office of Fair Trading, which licenses credit reference agencies, is that they will require subscribers not to make information available to third parties.

Poll Tax

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many regulation 41 poll tax committal hearings—means inquiries—have been held; and of these how many resulted in a suspended prison sentence.

Mr. John Patten: During the period 1 April 1990 to 31 December 1991, 11,259 means enquiries were held. No information is available on how many of these resulted in a suspended committal warrant.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is available as to the number of poll tax liability orders granted by magistrates courts against people in receipt of poll tax rebates.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not separately collected.

Sipho Mbete

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will be in a position to take a decision on the application by the UNHCR for asylum in the United Kingdom for Sipho Mbete before 14 February when the Zambian authorities have said that they will repatriate him to South Africa.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that Mr. Mbete has decided to withdraw his application and to return to South Africa. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is assisting in his return and has confirmed that his decision was made voluntarily.

Hillsborough Family Support Group

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will be in a position to reply to the letter from the Hillsborough family support group dated 22 October 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter sent to him on 22 October 1991 from the Hillsborough family support group in Liverpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A reply was sent to the Hillsborough family support group on 12 February 1992.

Gwent Police

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out his reasons for deciding to increase the establishment of the Gwent police force by one uniformed policeman.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State takes advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on increases in police establishments generally. A range of factors are taken into account in assessing a force's need for additional officers, such as police to population ratio, the incidence of crime, civilianisation and the effectiveness with which a force is utilising its existing resources. These factors indicated that, for 1992-93, Gwent's need for manpower is not as great as other forces, but my right hon. Friend decided that there was a case for a modest increase in its police establishment.

Tobacco Advertisements

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to seek changes in legislation to require that, when advertisements for tobacco products are seen on television at sporting and other events, a health warning is also given in vision and sound.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None. The broadcast coverage of tobacco company sponsored events, or events at which there is advertising for any tobacco company, is subject to a voluntary agreement reached between the Minister for Sport and the Tobacco Advisory Council in 1987.

Receivership

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the rules regarding the level of legal costs which may be granted out of company funds to directors of companies in administration or receivership.

Mr. Redwood: I have been asked to reply.

There are no such rules in the insolvency legislation. The receiver or administrator has discretion over which legal costs he should incur in the interests of carrying out his duties. Company directors in failed companies usually have to meet their own costs if legal action is taken against them.

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the advice issued to liquidators and administrators in relation to finance allowed to directors of companies in administration/liquidation or receivership.

Mr. Redwood: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for the liquidator's or administrator's professional judgment and is not the subject of advice issued by my Department.

In formal insolvency proceedings, a creditors committee may be established and may require information on those and other matters.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Credit and Home Owners

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the increase in the amount of credit in each year since 1985; and how much of this was provided in the form of mortgages to home-owners for spending for other purposes.

Mr. Maples: Full information is not available in the form requested. However, figures for the increase in the amount of credit supplied each year since 1985 including loans for house purchase are contained in Financial Statistics table 9.3.

North West Pensioners Liaison Forum

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had from the chairman of the North West Pensioners' Liaison Forum; what reply he is sending; if there is any action that he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The chairman of the forum wrote to me last month. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary replied on 12 February.

Income Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the lower income tax threshold; and what is the marginal rate of income tax at that threshold, in each of the EC member states.

Mr. Maude: Estimates based on the latest available information are given in the table. Unless otherwise stated the figures relate to 1991.

The threshold is the amount of gross income below which no tax is payable; the mariginal rate is the rate of tax charged on the first unit of taxable income.

Rates and thresholds relate to a single person, and to income from employment only. Standard deductions available to all employees have been taken into account.

Thresholds have been converted from local currencies into £ sterling using the latest available OECD purchasing power parities.

Country	*Threshold* £	*Marginal tax rate at threshold* *Per cent.*
Belgium	3,477	[1]25
Denmark	1,980	[1]52·8
France	5,339	19
Germany	2,512	19·7
Greece	2,502	18
Ireland (1991-92)	2,438	29
Italy	2,935	10
Luxembourg	5,035	10
Netherlands	1,173	13
Portugal	2,836	15
Spain	4,407	25
United Kingdom (1991-92)	3,295	25

[1] Includes local income tax.

Married Couple's Allowance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how many tax payers with gross earnings of £33,000 and above in 1992-93 will be entitled to a married couple's allowance.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that 760,000 tax payers with earnings from employment or self-employment over £33,000 will be entitled to the married couple's allowance in 1992-93 assuming statutory indexation.

Tax Exemption Certificates

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many income tax exemption certificates were in force in each year since 1980 *(a)* in total and *(b)* by industrial sector.

Mr. Maude: The numbers of Inland Revenue certificates in force at each year-end for self-employed subcontractors, enabling them to receive payment from contractors without any deduction on accout of tax, are shown in the table. The scheme applies only in the construction industry.

At 31 December	*Number*
1980	234,180
1981	245,335
1982	269,460
1983	310,964
1984	348,083
1985	375,981
1986	413,268
1987	443,447
1988	487,765
1989	519,242
1990	520,715
1991	501,836

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect of nominal exchange rate changes to date since the first quarter of 1991 on the trade-weighted Department of Trade and Industry and International Monetary Fund indices of relative export unit values for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 12 February 1992]:* Competitiveness depends on a number of factors, in particular the effectiveness of United Kingdom producers in controlling their costs.

Manufacturers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his estimate of the elasticity of demand for United Kingdom exports and imports of manufactures in terms of price in 1973, 1979, 1986 and currently; and what is the implied effect in each case, in terms of the subsequent growth in the volume of imports and exports, of the increase in the real exchange rate measured in terms of *(a)* relative export prices and *(b)* of the terms of trade which has since taken place;

(2) what is his current estimate of the elasticity of demand for United Kingdom imports and exports of manufacturers; and what is his estimate of the likely effect on the volume of imports and exports in each of the years 1993-95 of an increase in the rate of growth in each of those years *(a)* 1·5 per cent., *(b)* 2 per cent. and *(c)* 2·5 per cent. and of the effect on the balance of payments as a percentage of gross domestic product, and on output and employment.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* Precise estimates of the kind requested are not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect on the numbers employed in manufacturing of the increase in the trade-weighted relative price of United Kingdom exports to imports of finished manufactures between the second half of 1973 and first quarter of 1991; and if he will give figures for the number and the percentage loss of jobs in manufacturing since 1973 in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* Japan.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* Precise estimates of the effect of such relative price changes on numbers employed in manufacturing are not available. Comparable figures for changes in manufacturing employment in the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan are published in OECD Labour Force Statistics, which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect on the numbers employed in manufacturing industry of the change in the trade-weighted relative price of United Kingdom exports of manufactures between the second half of 1973 and the first quarter of 1991; and if he will publish a table showing the change over the same period in the sterling price of exports of manufactures with (i) the United Kingdom ex-factory price of manufactured goods other than food, drink, tobacco, printing and publishing and (ii) the weighted average increase in the retail price of such goods compared to that of other components in the retail prices index.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* Reliable estimates of the kind requested in the first part of the question are not available. The figures requested in the second part of the question could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

Pedestrian Crossings

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the specific measures taken by his Department to enforce motorists' respect for pedestrian rights at zebra and pelican crossings.

Mr. Chope: Enforcement of the law is a matter for the police. It is the responsibility of individual motorists to comply with the law on pedestrian crossings, which is set out in the highway code. The Department issues publicity to improve drivers' compliance with the crossing regulations.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to complete his review of pedestrian crossing facilities.

Mr. Chope: I intend to make an announcement later this month; I shall write to the hon. Member then.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give annual figures for injuries for the last 10 years for which figures are available, including the number of *(a)* children and *(b)* adults who have been hit by cars on or near pedestrian crossings in (i) the Metropolitan police area of London and (ii) England and Wales.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is as follows:

Child and adult pedestrians injured when hit by cars on or near pedestrian crossings in the Metropolitan police area of London, and England and Wales: 1981-1990

	London[1]		*England and Wales*	
	Child[2]	*Adult*	*Child*	*Adult*
1981				
On Crossing	324	808	1,100	1,928
Within zig-zag lines[3]	347	773	422	878
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	—	—	643	980

	London[1]		*England and Wales*	
	Child[2]	*Adult*	*Child*	*Adult*
Total	671	1,581	2,165	3,786
1982				
On Crossing	381	907	1,198	2,197
Within zig-zag lines	31	66	107	184
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	349	782	1,023	1,768
Total	761	1,755	2,328	4,149
1983				
On Crossing	321	953	1,132	2,263
Within zig-zag lines	38	58	119	149
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	424	1,000	1,188	2,222
Total	783	2,011	2,439	4,634
1984				
On Crossing	383	987	1,270	2,411
Within zig-zag lines	33	54	100	144
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	461	1,032	1,192	2,334
Total	877	2,073	2,562	4,889
1985				
On Crossing	324	904	1,165	2,368
Within zig-zag lines	27	56	100	173
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	332	1,077	1,148	2,334
Total	683	2,037	2,413	4,875
1986				
On Crossing	340	977	1,150	2,633
Within zig-zag lines	18	57	94	163
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	344	1,059	1,144	2,487
Total	702	2,093	2,388	5,283
1987				
On Crossing	267	909	995	2,374
Within zig-zag lines	13	51	83	169
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	308	996	962	2,452
Total	588	1,956	2,040	4,995
1988				
On Crossing	270	958	1,048	2,588
Within zig-zag lines	26	41	101	239
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	301	939	988	2,395
Total	597	1,938	2,137	5,222
1989				
On Crossing	310	967	1,111	2,610
Within zig-zag lines	17	41	151	281
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	330	973	999	2,482
Total	657	1,981	2,261	5,373
1990				
On Crossing	333	926	1,122	2,602
Within zig-zag lines	13	44	156	285
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	346	851	1,046	2,272
Total	692	1,821	2,324	5,159

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[1] Metropolitan Police area

[2] Defined as aged 0 to 15

[3] These figures for the Metropolitan and some other areas include 'elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing'.

Traffic Cameras

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *63*, how many automatic cameras have been installed at traffic-light-controlled junctions; and how many more are planned this year.

Mr. Chope: Installation of camera sites and deployment of traffic light cameras are primarily matters for highway authorities in conjunction with the police. Complete information is therefore not available centrally, but it is known that by the end of 1991, traffic light cameras were in use at over 100 sites in England and Wales.

M25

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what consultations his Department had with representatives from local authorities over the decision to widen the M25;

(2) what representations he has received concerning the proposals to widen the M25;

(3) what environmental considerations his Department took into account in the decision to widen the M25;

(4) if he has met representatives of the London Boroughs Association over Government plans to widen the M25.

Mr. Chope: My Department has consulted widely with local authorities about the proposals for the M25 and will continue to do so. Many representations have been received from the public and representative bodies and will be carefully considered. The full range of environmental considerations have been taken into account and environmental assessments will take place for every scheme. The London Boroughs Association has not been a formal consultee but representatives of some of its member authorities have participated in the discussions.

Manchester Relief Road

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which agencies are contributing to the environmental impact assessment into the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road; and when this work commenced.

Mr. Chope: Consulting engineers and their associated landscape sub-consultants are carrying out environmental appraisals as part of the initial investigation of options. Representative environmental bodies have been consulted in confidence. The work began with the appointment of consultants in 1990.

Mr. A. D. Lawrie

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he first received correspondence relating to Mr. A. D. Lawrie of 79 Ninian road, Hemel Hempstead on the subject of the sale of car insurance by telephone; and when he expects to give a definitive answer to the points raised.

Mr. Chope: My Department first received correspondence from Mr. Lawrie on this subject on 19 February 1990. A substantive reply was sent on 20 April 1990. There has been later correspondence and I last wrote to my hon. Friend on the subject last September. I hope to send a further letter on outstanding points before the end of this month.

Roads, Leicester

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those dual carriageway sections of the eastern district distributor road that have been completed in Leicester and not used; the total unused carriageway and the reason it has not been brought fully into use.

Mr. Chope: This is not a matter for my Department. The eastern district distributor is a local road for which Leicestershire county council, as the highway authority, is responsible.

However, I understand that none of the eastern district distributor road has yet been completed, but that 0·4 miles of the contiguous single carriageway A46/A47 link have ben completed but are unused at present.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost to public funds so far of the non-usage of city sections of the eastern district distributor road in Leicester; and what additional cost city ratepayers are to be required to meet in this respect.

Mr. Chope: This is not a matter for my Department. The eastern district distributor road is a local road for which Leicestershire county council, as the highway authority, is responsible.

However, I understand that none of the eastern district distributor road has yet been constructed, but that the total cost of the unused section of the contiguous A46/A47 link to be of the order of £0·5 million of which the Department has provided 50 per cent through transport supplementary grant.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the pollution levels from the eastern district distribution roads that will affect the residents of Victoria Court flats, Oadby.

Mr. Chope: This is not a matter for my Department. The eastern district distributor road is a local road for which Leicestershire county council, as the highway authority, is responsible.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the eastern district distribution road will qualify for transport subsidy grant if it is a single carriageway throughout its length.

Mr. Chope: It is for Leicestershire county council to seek transport supplementary grant for this scheme. It would be assessed, in competition nationally, with schemes from other county councils irrespective of the proposed standard of the road.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will cost the Henwood proposals for the Leicester bypass.

Mr. Chope: The Department's concern is with the strategic trunk road network and, in particular around Leicester, to provide continuity of this network for long-distance traffic by connecting the A46 north and the city with the A6 to the south-west. Various options are being considered within a broad corridor to the east of Leicester. The Henwood proposals go beyond this objective and would provide a southern bypass of the city. We will not, therefore, be costing the Henwood proposals.

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department spent on funding research and development of air traffic control systems last year; and how much is planned for the next four years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Research and development of such systems is carried out by the Civil Aviation Authority, as the United Kingdom body directly concerned with air traffic control matters. In 1990-91 the authority's budgeted expenditure on air traffic services research and development was £9·7 million, and the budget for 1991-92 is £11·0 million. The budget for future years has not been finalised.

In addition, the United Kingdom contributes to the expenditure of Eurocontrol, of which it is a member, and which has a substantial programme of research and development of air traffic control systems.

School Crossing Patrols

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review his policy of disregarding parked cars in the vicinity as a criterion for deciding priority for school crossing patrols.

Mr. Chope: My Department has not issued advice on criteria for deciding priority for school crossing patrols. This is a matter for local authorities other than in the Metropolitan police district of London where the responsibility falls to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I understand that local authority road safety officers have developed guidance on the establishment of school crossing patrol sites through the national school crossing patrol working party and that this guidance is used widely by local authorities.

Skeffington Bypass

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that the new Skeffington bypass, Leicestershire will be constructed to dual carriageway specification.

Mr. Chope: In common with all other trunk road improvement schemes the appropriate carriageway standard will be determined in accordance with our normal criteria which takes into account a number of factors including cost, value for money, traffic flow and environmental impact.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the Skeffington bypass proposed on the A47, Leicester to cover the whole length of road from the end of the Billesdon bypass to Tugby.

Mr. Chope: The Department has no proposals at present to extend the Skeffington scheme which is planned to route traffic away from the village and improve the alignment of the A47 in that vicinity.

A47, Leicestershire

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people have been killed on the A47 between Houghton-on-the-Hill and Tugby in Leicestershire in the past six months.

Mr. Chope: Five. Two were killed on the Billesdon bypass in August 1991, one near Houghton-on-the-Hill in November 1991 and two near Skeffington in January 1992.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that all future improvements on the A47 should be of dual carriageway construction.

Mr. Chope: In common with all other trunk road improvement schemes, the appropriate carriageway standard will be determined in accordance with our normal criteria which takes into account a number of factors including cost, value for money, traffic flow and environmental impact.

Traffic Flow Statistics

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will supply estimated traffic flow figures, in both directions, for the following sections of the Henwood proposals *(a)* the southern section from the Everards roundabout at the beginning of Soar Valley way to the A6 at Oadby, *(b)* from the A6 to the A47 and *(c)* from the A47 to the A46 Newark/Nottingham road.

Mr. Chope: These proposals have not been promoted or examined by my Department and I have no information on traffic flows along their length. We are assessing traffic flows generally in connection with the Leicester eastern bypass scheme. This assessment will take account of the effect of other roads in the area.

Norsea

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why his Department's officials at Hull docks, supervising the trial of new lifeboat equipment on the passenger ferry Norsea on 5 February did not insist that the crewsmen testing the equipment wore life-jackets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The marine accident investigation bureau is investigating the incident referred to. Its report will address the use of life-jackets and it is not appropriate for me to comment any further at this stage except to state that the officials did not take a supervisory role.

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who are the members of his team reviewing the strategic and defence needs for British merchant shipping; when he expects this review to be completed; and if he will place copies of the review when complete in the Library.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have been asked to reply.

The defence need for merchant shipping is kept under regular review as part of normal planning. The ability of British merchant shipping to meet those needs is being considered inter Departmentally and a statement will be made in due course. There will not be a published report.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ambassadorial Limousines

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the original purchase price paid and the eventual disposal price obtained in the last three transactions involving Rolls-Royce motor cars belonging to Her Majesty's embassies sold out of service.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: For commercial reasons the terms of sale between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Rolls-Royce Motor Cars are confidential.

The proceeds of the last three sales of Rolls-Royce cars by missions overseas were:

Date and Mission	*Price realised* £
12 May 1989 British Embassy, Bonn	37,931·08
20 April 1990 British High Commission, Canberra	67,370·89
27 June 1990 United Kingdom Mission to United Nations, New York	34,292·34

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number, location and all relevant criteria considered in deciding which of Her Majesty's embassies warrant the use of a Rolls-Royce motor car.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Eight Rolls-Royce motor cars have been provided in recent years for the use of our representatives in Bonn, Canberra, Moscow, United Nations (New York), Paris, Pretoria, Tokyo and Washington. The criteria considered includes the importance of these capitals to British interests generally and to Rolls-Royce Motor Cars in particular, operational requirements, initial purchase price, availability of servicing facilities, local conditions, running costs and potential re-sale value.

Gibraltar

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning migrant workers in Gibraltar; what representations he has made to the administration of Gibraltar about migrant workers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Transport and General Workers Union has recently written to me drawing to my attention the report on the position of Moroccan workers in Gibraltar produced by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants. We are considering the report with the Gibraltar Government. We have not received any other representations about migrant workers in Gibraltar.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain a copy of the report by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, entitled "Between a Rock and a Hard Place," for his departmental library.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A copy will be obtained as required.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Government of Morocco to Her Majesty's Government and to the Gibraltar Administration about the treatment of its nationals in Gibraltar; and what response has been made.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I have not received any such representations from the Government of Morocco, nor so far as I am aware have the Gibraltar Government.

Israel

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom and the European Community arms embargoes on Israel, introduced after the invasion of the Lebanon in 1982, remain in force.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our restrictions on the sale of defence equipment to Israel remains in place. There was never a formal EC arms embargo on Israel.

CFE Treaty

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made to date in the implementation of the conventional forces in Europe treaty in Hungary, the Cezech and Slovak republics, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The 22 states of the North Atlantic Alliance and the Warsaw Pact signed the conventional forces in Europe treaty on 19 November 1990. The United Kingdom ratified the treaty on 19 November 1991. Thirteen other states have also ratified, including the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Hungary and the Republic of Poland.

The treaty will not enter into force until all signatory states have ratified. The main obstacle to entry into force is uncertainty over the application to the armed forces of the former Soviet Union of treaty provisions on equipment holdings.

NATO and other CFE signatories have together established a high level working group to address these problems. The British Government are committed to early entry into force of the CFE treaty, which we regard as a cornerstone of stability in the new Europe.

Pakistan (Nuclear Development)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government have made any representations to the Government of Pakistan following Pakistan's announcement that it has the know-how and technology to explode a nuclear warhead.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Yes. We have noted the Pakistani Government's subsequent assurances of their commitment to non-proliferation and have urged them once again to formalise this by accession to the NPT.

Singapore

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will invite the Prime Minister of Japan to attend a commemorative service on the 50th anniversary of the Japanese invasion of Singapore; if he will seek compensation for allied military and civil prisoners of war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are no plans to extend such an invitation. Nevertheless, we recognise the poignancy of the anniversary and honour the sacrifice of those who fought and died in south east Asia during the second world war. We shall never forget that great debt, nor the terrible sufferings of so many in Japanese prison camps. We consider, however, that the question of compensation was settled in the 1951 peace treaty.

Soviet Nuclear Exports

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the study "Controlling Soviet Nuclear Exports; The New Proliferation Challenge".

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes.

Indonesia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Indonesia's occupation of East Timor was discussed during the recent visit of his Indonesian counterpart to London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: East Timor was discussed during the visit. We welcomed the interest of the United Nations Secretary-General. The Indonesians are well aware that the United Kingdom does not recognise de jure the annexation and occupation of East Timor.

UN Human Rights Commission

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals will be made by Her Majesty's Government to the annual conference of the United Nations Human Rights Commission this month.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In my speech to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on 30 January, I reaffirmed the British Government's commitment to human rights, and urged the Commission to focus on the issue of holding human rights abusers accountable for their actions. Our delegation to the Commission will also support the extension of the mandates of the Special Rapporteurs and work towards resolutions on several country situations including Burma and Iraq.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cross-Solent Ferry Services

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report into the cross-Solent ferry services.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend published the report on 12 February.

Red Mercury

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what security controls are in place to monitor the international sales of red mercury.

Mr. Redwood: I am advised that the substance known as red mercury has long been incorrectly associated with capabilities in nuclear weapons development. Neither mercury oxide nor mercury sulphide, whether or not in the form which gives them their red colour, are subject to export control from the United Kingdom. If "red mercury" is a code name for enriched uranium, then controls apply.

Indonesia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investment credits have been made available to Indonesia in each year since 1979; and if he will give details in each case.

Mr. Redwood: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to publish the details of the Export Credits Guarantee Departments support for business transacted on individual markets for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

SCOTLAND

Traffic Offences

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many motorists have been *(a)* charged with and *(b)* convicted of assault against (i) pedestrians, (ii) cyclists and (iii) other motorists, in each year since 1981.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the existing Scottish work force has vocational qualifications.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 11 February 1992]:* Information relating to the qualifications held by those who are of working age, and economically active, is available from the labour force survey. In 1990, the proportion of this group holding one or more qualifications was 72 per cent. It is not possible to distinguish academic and vocational qualifications because only the highest qualification held is recorded.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance he has given to the trust hospitals concerning the appointment of senior staff, advertising of posts, equal opportunities and salary levels.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* Terms and conditions of trust employees are essentially matters for the trust board but as "NHS Trusts: A Working Guide" makes clear trusts will be required to follow proper procedures as set out in employment legislation; to demonstrate a positive commitment to equal opportunities; and to ensure that there is no unfair discrimination. Trusts are also aware of the need to ensure that salaries are set at levels which properly reflect the responsibilities involved and secure value for money.

WALES

Farm Incomes

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage change in the value of farming incomes in Wales after taking inflation into account in each year since 1987.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

	Current prices £000	*Real terms (1986 = 100) £000*	*Percentage change*
1986	46,957	46,957	51·6
1987	55,482	53,297	13·5
1988	73,380	67,167	26·0
1989	61,455	52,178	−22·3
1990	40,045	31,055	−40·5
1991	46,018	33,715	8·6

Crickhowell-Abergavenny Bypass

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the Crickhowell-Abergavenny bypass; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There are two separate bypass proposals—the A40 Crickhowell bypass and the A40/A465 Abergavenny western bypass.

Over 700 representations have been received on proposals for Crickhowell. Careful consideration is being given to the views expressed before a decision is made about any bypass for the town.

The preferred route for the Abergavenny western bypass was announced in 1988. Draft orders for the proposed scheme are expected to be published later this year.

Vehicle Watch Scheme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will detail his reason for rejecting an application for urban aid to support the vehicle watch scheme pioneered in Newport.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The urban programme is a competitive scheme. In the 1992-93 programme, priority was given to strategy-based projects and projects targeted at the most deprived wards in Wales, as identified under the 1991 ward-based index of deprivation. Beyond this, we continue to give the highest priority to major economic and environmental projects and to voluntary sector inspired schemes.

The vehicle watch project was not successful because, in urban programme terms, other projects were regarded as having a higher priority under the above criteria.

I was, however, pleased to support the launch of Vehicle Watch Wales with a grant of £7,000 towards the cost of producing bilingual literature.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from Gwent police authority concerning the financing of its vehicle watch scheme; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The clerk of Gwent police authority wrote to the Department on 11 February. The letter is under consideration and a reply will be issued shortly. I was pleased to support the launch of Vehicle Watch Wales with a grant of £7,000 towards the cost of producing bilingual literature.

Tobacco Advertisements

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what response he intends to make to the decision of European Standing Committee B on 5 February and the observation of Heartbeat Wales on the desirability of banning tobacco advertisements.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Government continue to believe that the best way to control tobacco advertising is by means of a voluntary agreement. Since 1971, there has been a system of voluntary agreements with the tobacco industry which provides control over the advertising and promotion of cigarettes. A new, tougher voluntary agreement with the tobacco industry has recently come into force and strong new health warnings are now appearing on advertisements.

Data are emerging from those countries which have advertising laws and the Government are studying the figures with interest.

Gwent Health Authority

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the implications for the funding of the NHS of the decision by Gwent area health authority not to employ 10 midwives who completed their training this week at the Royal Gwent hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I understand that offers of employment will be made by the authority to those of the group who have qualified and wish to remain in Gwent.

Expenditure on education and training is of course a long-term investment and there is invariably a certain amount of mobility among newly qualified staff. Staffing levels are set in the light of local working practices and changing needs and priorities and employing authorities have never been able to give guarantees that posts will be offered to all nurses and midwives on completion of their training.

It is a measure of the success of the new grading structure for clinical nurses and midwives and the attractiveness of the salaries paid to qualified staff that there has been a general improvement in retention rates throughout Wales, particularly in the more senior grades. In Gwent, the turn-over rate for midwives has reduced very significantly over the past two years and projected vacancies have not materialised. The NHS in Wales has made considerable progress in the area of manpower planning and the Department is working closely with the service—through the manpower resource group—to monitor and strengthen the planning process to ensure that the training and supply of professional staff correlates closely to predicted staffing requirements.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the revenue expenditure of each regional health authority on health service facilities for patients with a mental handicap for each year since 1981, in cash terms and at 1991 prices.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 7 February 1992]:* Planning and expenditure on mental handicap services in Wales is done jointly by health and social services authorities in county joint planning teams. The latest total expenditure figures, at outturn prices, are as follows:

Year	*£*
1987-88	47,779,730
1988-89	57,290,027
1989-90	65,737,589

Welsh Office additional funds are included in these figures and have grown from £9·6 million in 1987-88 to £34·5 million in 1991-92.

Prior to 1987-88, the expenditure data which were collected on hospital and community health services in Wales for patients with a mental handicap were incomplete and therefore unrepresentative of total provision. Spending on these service since 1987-88 has been as follows:

District Health Authority	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £	*1989-90* £	*1990-91* £
At outturn prices				
Clwyd	1,150,026	1,326,628	1,296,447	1,407,373
East Dyfed	583,854	834,948	1,001,426	1,154,741
Gwent	3,403,610	3,879,016	3,645,650	3,840,020
Gwynedd	2,686,428	3,166,632	3,398,161	3,492,023
Mid Glamorgan	5,815,668	6,436,055	6,494,660	6,897,613
Pembrokeshire	428,257	435,605	459,992	551,486
Powys	2,496,041	2,799,763	3,026,368	3,394,234
South Glamorgan	3,766,849	4,610,337	5,207,693	5,456,161
West Glamorgan	857,899	1,211,904	1,061,263	1,075,431
Total	21,188,632	24,700,888	25,591,590	27,269,082
At 1990-91 prices				
Clwyd	1,423,916	1,532,522	1,406,445	1,407,373
East Dyfed	722,905	964,533	1,086,393	1,154,741
Gwent	4,214,214	4,481,044	3,954,968	3,840,020
Gwynedd	3,326,228	3,658,098	3,686,481	3,492,023
Mid Glamorgan	7,200,728	7,434,939	7,045,704	6,897,613
Pembrokeshire	530,251	503,212	498,944	551,486
Powys	3,090,498	3,234,290	3,283,143	3,394,234
South Glamorgan	4,663,962	5,325,867	5,649,544	5,456,161
West Glamorgan	1,062,216	1,399,993	1,151,307	1,075,431
Total	26,234,918	28,534,498	27,762,929	27,269,082

Notes:

1. The figures presented for 1990-91 are provisional at this stage.
2. The figures relate to hospital services' expenditure and community health services' expenditure, where this can be separately identified. The hospital services' figures relate only to direct clinical and diagnostic services to patients and therefore do not include any attribution of expenditure in respect of general services such as administration, transport, hotel services or estate management. Similarly, the community health services' figures relate only to the nursing element of community services for those with a mental handicap.

Source:

District Health Authorities.
Financial Returns.
All Wales Mental Handicap Strategy Annual Report 1988-89—1989-90.

Community Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what policy initiatives he proposes to advance community care in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding answer 13 February 1992]:* We continue our programme of wide-ranging measures to imlement the reforms set out in the "Caring for People" White Paper (Cm 849) which will improve community care.

This includes:

Comprehensive guidance on assessment and care management, and centrally financed pilot projects in each county.

Guidance on the preparation of fully joint social care plans, which are being prepared under the leadership of social services authorities working with health, family health service and housing authorities, and in full consultation with user and carer interests. These are to be published by 1 April.

A requirement that social services authorities and their partners should publish readily understandable guides for users and carers setting out arrangements for assessment and care management, standards of services, and for complaints and other representations if services do not live up to those published standards.

A unique central funding scheme to encourage the development of more flexible forms of community care for elderly people and people with physical or sensory disabilities, under which 46 projects are already being supported, with more to follow next year.

Central funding for a training support programme to help prepare front-line staff. Further resources will be available in the coming year.

In introducing these measures, we have built upon the experience gained in Wales from our unique mental handicap and mental illness strategies which continue. My right hon. Friend will announce shortly his proposals for the development of the mental handicap strategy from April 1993.

On top of the record levels of resources we are providing to health and social services authorities for their discretionary use within our policies and programmes, we are providing nearly £43 million of direct grant for community care. We will announce soon additional resources for 1992-93.

Rail Crossings

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications he estimates will be made in Wales in the five years following the coming into operation of the provisions in schedule 2 of the Transport and Works Bill for *(a)* rail crossing diversion orders in respect of bridleways, *(b)* rail crossing extinguishment orders in respect of bridleways, *(c)* rail crossing diversion orders in respect of footpaths and *(d)* rail crossing extinguishment orders in respect of footpaths.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for railway operators, primarily British Rail, but I understand that no comprehensive forecasts are currently available.

DEFENCE

Procurement Executive

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many senior officials in the Ministry of Defence Procurement Executive have had previous long-term experience of working in the defence industry or any other manufacturing industry.

Mr. Alan Clark: Nineteen.

RAF Raynham

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to transfer the land and/or buildings at RAF Raynham to local authorities, or any other organisation, for housing or community purposes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to do so at present.

RAF Coltishall

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to close RAF Coltishall.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are continuing to examine the scope for further rationalisation in RAF support. Any decisions will be announced as they are made.

Earthmoving Equipment (Iraq)

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence his Department has received that earthmoving equipment supplied by United Kingdom companies was used by Iraqi forces in military operations during the period 1989 to 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no evidence that earth-moving equipment supplied by the United Kingdom was used for military operations by Iraq.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what types of aircraft will be deployed to Goose bay, Canada, for low flying training in 1992; what are the planned dates of deployment; and how many sorties the RAF expects to fly from Goose bay during 1992.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is planned that nine Tornado GR1 and eight Tornado F3 aircraft will be deployed to Goose bay in 1992. Tornado GR1s will be deployed initially between 2 and 7 April and thereafter from 22 May to 25 September. It is planned that they will carry out some 1,350 low level training sorties. Tornado F3s will be deployed from 26 May to 7 July and will carry out some 350 sorties, each of which will include an element at low level. C130 Hercules aircraft undertaking routine resupply tasks to Goose bay will also carry out a small number of low-level training sorties.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what enhancements of existing facilities have been made since 1989 in order to achieve a more even distribution of low flying throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Government's policy of spreading low flying as widely as possible has been pursued through a continuous review of the low-flying system. We expect the distribution of low flying to be further improved in future by a fast-jet turn round facility which is being established at RAF Leuchars.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about low flying in each of the years 1986 to 1990 came from addresses located within Low Flying Area 18.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The numbers of inquiries or complaints about low-flying training which my Department received in each of the years 1986 to 1990 from addresses located within low-flying area 18 are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1986	374
1987	237
1988	276
1989	264
1990	184

Gibraltar

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was his Department's contribution to the economy of Gibraltar, in cash and kind, in the current and previous financial years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We do not make any assessment of this Department's contribution to the economy of Gibraltar. In the current financial year my Department expects to spend approximately £60 million in maintaining our interests in Gibraltar. Figures for previous financial years are not readily available.

Military Equipment Sales

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total value in pounds sterling of all military equipment sold by the United Kingdom to overseas Governments in 1990 and 1991; and how much was allocated to Third world countries.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991, volume 2, table 2.7, for the information for 1990. Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

Guard Service

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans exist to provide the MOD guard service with constabulary powers.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: None.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans exist to equip the MOD guard service with firearms.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: None.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the MOD police complementing criteria will be affected by the introduction of the MOD guard service.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *683-84*, in which year he intends to place an order for the design and build of the first of class of a further class of nuclear-powered fleet submarines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There is nothing further I can add to the reply my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark) gave the hon. Gentleman on 29 November 1991, *Official Report*, columns *683-84*.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has told the management of VSEL in which year he intends to place an order for the design and build of the first of class of a further class of nuclear-powered fleet submarines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The company has been provided with the planning information required to conduct the design studies contract without commitment to further orders. No decisions on the order date have yet been taken.

Housing Task Force

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many announcements have been made regarding the work of the housing task force since it was established.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The work of the housing task force has been referred to in the defence debate of 15 October and in response to parliamentary questions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence hopes to make a further announcement shortly.

Air-to-Air Missile

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is now in a position to state the date on which he will make a decision about the tender evaluation for the advanced short-range air-to-air missile; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 20 January, *Official Report*, column 32.

Missiles

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many batteries of Rapier field standard C missile systems he intends to bring into service in *(a)* 1992-93, *(b)* 1993-94, and *(c)* 1994-95.

Mr. Alan Clark: We currently plan to deploy by the mid-1990s two batteries of Rapier field standard C with the Army and three squadrons with the RAF.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which year he envisages the European fighter aircraft will complete its development programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: The industrial programme for the development of the European fighter aircraft has a completion date of 1999.

C130 Transport Aircraft

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which years he envisages that *(a)* the development programme and *(b)* the production programme of the replacement for the current C130 transport aircraft will begin.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is our intention to procure replacement aircraft for the RAF transport fleet around the turn of the century. We have no plans to participate in a development programme for such an aircraft.

MOD Police

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans exist to expand the MOD police.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: We expect there to be a small increase in the short term. In the long term the numbers will reflect the size of the defence estate and the ability of the MOD guard service to perform some tasks which do not require police powers or the use of firearms. No final figure for the size of the force can be given at this stage.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans exist to provide the proposed MOD guard service with similar training to the MOD police.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The two-week MOD guard service basic course is designed to provide the necessary skills and knowledge for their security-oriented duties; it is dissimilar from the MOD police recruit course which lasts 13 weeks based on the standard police training given to recruits to Home Department police forces.

Military Training

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now make it his practice to provide information on military assistance or training given to named countries by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Details of training provided for overseas military personnel are not normally disclosed as they are confidential between Her Majesty's Government and the Governments concerned. There are no plans to change this practice.

Regiment Establishments

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the number of serving officers and other ranks in *(a)* the 2 Battalion, the Queen's Regiment, *(b)* the King's Own Royal Border Regiment, *(c)* the 1 Battalion, the Royal Anglian Regiment and *(d)* the Royal Hampshire Regiment, expressed as a percentage increase or deficit above or below their respective peacetime establishments;

(2) what is the projected number of serving officers and other ranks in the 1 Battalion, the Staffordshire Regiment on 1 May, expressed as a percentage increase or deficit above or below its peacetime establishment;

(3) what was the number of serving officers and other ranks in the 1 Battalion, the Staffordshire Regiment on 11 February, expressed as a percentage increase or deficit above or below its peacetime establishment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Recruitment

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current estimated number of 16 to 24-year-old males in the recruiting areas of *(a)* the Queen's Regiment, *(b)* the King's Own Royal Border Regiment, *(c)* the Royal Anglian Regiment and *(d)* the Royal Hampshire Regiment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information is not available in the precise form requested, as no regiment recruits exclusively within a particular geographical area. The table shows the total population in the 16 to 24-year-old age group in the following Army districts in 1990:

Population in the 16 to 24-year-old group

Army district	[1]*1990*
South East	538·5
London	456·5
North West	461·3
Eastern	624·9

[1] Population (thousands).

Departmental Property

Mr. Menzies-Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what heritable property his Department *(a)* acquired and *(b)* leased in Scotland in each year since 1986;

(2) if he will list by region the heritable property other than that owned or leased over which his Department has the right to carry out military training in Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors determine whether his Department acquires or obtains the lease of land in Scotland for military training purposes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The military requirement for short or long-term use, cost and the commercial preference of the owner.

Military Estate

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether, as part of "Options for Change", a review has been carried out of the military estate in Scotland;

(2) if he will conduct a review of the land presently owned or leased by his Department in Scotland for military training purposes with a view to disposing of any that is surplus to requirements.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The size of the defence estate is kept under constant review.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions and on what dates in the last five years for which information is available military training has taken place in Tentsmuir forest.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether, when his Department leases land from the Forestry Commission in Scotland, a market value rent is paid.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the terms of the agreement between his Department and the Forestry Commission for the use of Tentsmuir forest for military training purposes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No formal agreement exists. Tentsmuir forest is used on an occasional basis and terms are negotiated for each period of use.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by region the heritable property *(a)* owned or *(b)* leased by his Department in Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 1 April 1991, the total area, in hectares, of land and foreshore owned or leased by the Ministry of Defence in Scotland by region was:

	Hectares
Highland	5,210
Strathclyde	5,200
Dumfries and Galloway	4,209
Grampian	2,207
Tayside	1,454
Western Isles	1,339
Fife	1,328
Lothian	1,160
Central	80
Shetland Islands	46
Orkney Islands	5
Borders	—

All areas of leased land included in the totals are subject to leases of three years or more; those of shorter duration are regarded as temporary and not recorded centrally. Totals exclude areas over which the Ministry of Defence has occasional training rights.

Local Area Missile System

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Spanish Government gave notice of their intention to withdraw from the local area missile system programme; what are the implications for the future of the programme; and how much has been spent by his Department to date on the programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: Spain gave notice of its intention to withdraw on 4 December 1991. The project definition phase of this programme will continue. To date, my Department has spent £700,000.

Soviet Nuclear Brain Drain

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the report "Coping with the Soviet Nuclear Brain Drain: An Environmental Approach".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence library has a copy of this report on order.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 203

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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